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CAVALRY OF THE AIR

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The Aeronautical Collection of
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CAVALRY OF THE AIR

BY

"FLIGHT COMMANDER"

Illustrated by

GEOFFREY WATSON

LONDON:

ED. J. BURROW & CO., LTD.,

AND

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"The ancient age of chivalry is past, its glory and adventure are forgotten, the glamour of its romance has faded, but from the ashes of the old *régime* has risen a new and far more daring order of knighthood — the 'Cavalry of the Air.'"

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

ONE evening, after my return from France, I happened to be seated at dinner, clad in mufti, and having on my right hand a certain pleasant old lady.

After the manner of ladies anxious to promote polite conversation, she turned the subject of discussion to what might justly be supposed to be my favourite topic—my own doings.

"I hear you have just returned from overseas," she said. "What have you been doing there?"

I replied that I had been acting as "observer" with the Air Force in France and was at present home for a rest.

"Oh!" she exclaimed after a dubious interval of reflection: "How nice it must

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be to be attached to the staff of a *really* good newspaper—I think press work at the Front must be *so* interesting ! "

For a moment I must admit I felt somewhat taken aback.

Deep as is my respect for the *Observer* and its distinguished editor, I should better have received that implied compliment at any other time, and in any other manner than at the expense of the Service to which I was privileged to belong.

That the Air Force, which has risen in magnitude and importance to a position of equality with the elder Services, could be the subject of strange misconceptions such as this had never till then occurred to me. That there should be people at home whose interest in war-flying was limited to a perusal of the brief numerical statements of enemy machines destroyed, and for whom the word " observer " had only

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a newspaper significance, appeared to me grotesque in the extreme. No one, for instance, would dream of confusing an Army platoon sergeant with a "special representative" of *John Bull*, in spite of a somewhat similar vehemence of diction, for the ordinary routine and organisation of the Army and Navy are matters of common knowledge to all classes.

It is only the Air Force, the mushroom growth of the War, which has so far failed to explain itself to the wider public; and it is to some extent for this reason I have taken of late to indulging in what my flying colleagues are wont to designate as "hot-air." Of the result the reader will be able to judge.

I have not attempted to write a history of my squadron—the Nth—but rather to produce a series of pictures of the life of flying men in France and to relate the circumstances under which pilots and

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observers of the Air Force are accustomed to do their work above and beyond the lines.

Of the work itself I can truly say that the War provides nothing comparable for tense and vivid interest to the daily duties of airmen overseas.

With every month that passes this work becomes more complex and its duties more arduous.

New machines are built, new methods are adopted, new devices are contrived to render our vast aerial machinery, at home and on the battle fronts, more complete and more effective.

Even as I write I feel that the great tide of aerial progress is sweeping onwards so rapidly that in a short space we—the old Nth Squadron—and our doings may be but half-forgotten memories of an old order which later developments have rendered almost obsolete.

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In our day, however, we were a "crack" squadron, with a record which future squadrons will find it hard to beat—if only in casualties; and in that respect Heaven forbid that we should ever find an equal!

"FLIGHT COMMANDER."

LONDON, 1918.

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PART I.

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CAVALRY OF THE AIR

CHAPTER I

THE "LONG JUMP"

ANY one who chanced to visit the aerodrome at Fanbury on a certain morning in May would have seen lined up before the flight sheds a group of some twelve machines. They shone resplendent in the sunshine, with the full glory of recent factory varnish and, even to a casual observer, presented a striking appearance.

Streamers fluttered from their struts, tri-colour markings showed up vivid and distinct against the khaki fabric, while, as if to correct the impression created by this gala-like display, the sinister muzzle of a Lewis gun, protruded from the

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observer's cockpit of each machine, testifying to more business-like intentions.

For me those twelve machines had a particular significance. Collectively, they formed part of the equipment of the Nth Squadron, to which I was then attached in the capacity of observer, and one of them was to be the " mount " in which I was destined to fly overseas.

To the Nth Squadron, the particular morning of which I write was of all mornings the one most fraught with meaning.

For days past we had spoken of it mysteriously and with varying feelings of anticipation. It had been the subject of discussion on hundreds of occasions, and was to form the climax of months of cumulative preparation.

It was the morning of the Nth Squadron's official birth—the morning upon which its name would be finally erased from the

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records of the "Home Establishment" and transferred to the Active Service list. In fact, to put it into terse and somewhat more colloquial language, we were for what is commonly known as the "Long Jump!"[1]

Only a few hours before, we—the future occupants of the twelve machines previously described—had received final orders to proceed to France by air forthwith.

Our transport had already left by road for Doford, its port of embarkation, together with the mechanics and such other *personnel* as could not be taken across by air. The articles of kit which were likely to be required for immediate use, we had already stowed away in our machines, although in view of the limited space available, this in most cases consisted merely of pyjamas and a toothbrush.

Our programme for the immediate future

[1] Departure overseas.

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had been arranged in two acts. The first would comprise a flight from Fanbury to St. Omer, where we should probably remain for a couple of days to get in touch with our transport again and to collect the inevitable stragglers.

The second act, the details of which had been studiously concealed from the general public, was to consist of a move from St. Omer to ——, the aerodrome behind the lines, from which our future activities against the Huns would be directed.

Such in brief was the situation at Fanbury on this morning in June, and such was our immediate outlook as we bustled about in a state of excitement (which a journalist would picturesquely describe as "feverish"), making our last hurried preparations for the flight across the Channel.

* * * * *

In order to make clear to the reader certain events which preceded this cul-

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minating point of the Nth Squadron's history, I find that to some extent I must indulge in retrospect.

My own connection with the squadron had been only a very brief one.

I had arrived at Fanbury late one afternoon about six days previously, in a frame of mind which could not justly be described by the comprehensive term "wind up," but which certainly included most of the elements of a fairly strong draught.

Fanbury struck me as a place remarkable in many respects, but my principal impression at the time was that the contractor responsible for its erection had indulged in a perfect orgy of corrugated iron. I had scarcely imagined it possible that there could be so much corrugated iron in Great Britain. Hangars, buildings, huts, balloon sheds, all shone aggressively in the afternoon sunshine, and even the

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camouflage paint, with which they were being covered, had so far failed to diminish their brilliancy to any great extent. Engines droned continuously; machines sped about in the blue sky overhead; and an air of tireless activity pervaded the whole place. Such was Fanbury, the home of new inventions, the mother of many old ones, the place which has been the nursery of aviation since the days of Cody.

I made my way towards a building which I was told contained the orderly room of the Nth Squadron, my mind crowded with vague conjectures. I had been trained as an observer and in that capacity I was ostensibly to accompany the Nth Squadron overseas. In consequence, my future, my whole existence in fact, seemed to me at that moment to depend upon two issues which would be made clear in the course of the next few minutes: who was to be

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my pilot overseas, and what was to be the type of machine we were to fly there?

* * * * *

The answer I received to these two important questions I can best convey to the reader by endeavouring to picture in words the old Nth Squadron as I first found it, that afternoon in May.

In the ordinary way it would be difficult to judge the merits of a fighting unit, as yet untried by the test of war, but looking back upon it as I do, across the perspective of time, and in the light of subsequent experience, I can say that seldom has a squadron left this country under more favourable auspices.

It was a *good* squadron. I do not make this assertion out of deference for the popular adage that "a man is known by his company," but because the omens presaged it, and results subsequently proved the fact. It was a squadron

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possessed of that most essential complement of all good squadrons — good machines; for they were of a speed which even the optimism of the designer did not greatly overestimate, and their lightness upon the controls was the subject of eulogy by every one who flew them.

Our pilots were mostly men of proven skill picked for their prowess and dexterity in the air, and the observers—no words could do justice to their stamina and endurance!

In the course of a long and arduous training we had become accustomed to being hurled about in the air by pilots of somewhat doubtful skill, and even our opprobrious title of "shock absorbers"[1]

[1] A derogatory name given to observers apparently because some persons considered that their chief use was to act as a "cushion" or shock-absorber in event of a crash.

It is also probably partly derived from the fact that any spare jobs of a dreary type or any superfluous "hot air" is usually diverted to, and "absorbed" by, the observers of a squadron.

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had become a source of cynical amusement to us.

On arrival at the Nth Squadron we had each been posted as observer to a certain pilot, and in view of the unpleasant suggestion contained in our painful sobriquet, it is not difficult to imagine that the result of this allotment loomed before us almost in the form of a decree of fate. We waited to learn the name of the partner in whose company we should be destined to share "the fortunes of war for 'good or ill,'" with a tense anxiety comparable only to that which must be experienced by the applicant at a matrimonial agency, when first waiting to see the object of a compromising correspondence—someone with whom he has perhaps committed himself to share a somewhat similar prospect, with similar alternatives!

I first saw my prospective pilot at the top of a pair of steps!

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He was standing there, examining the adjustment of the forward Vickers gun on his machine, and the moment I recognised him I was filled with relief. It was K——, a man whom I had already met. Even then he was considered a stout fellow and a pilot of great promise, for he had already brought down several Hun machines overseas; whilst to-day he is numbered among those great ones of whom it is only permitted to speak with bated breath—in fact, I am tempted to place the wrong initial letter before his name to camouflage it more effectively.

My pleasure at this fortunate encounter was only equalled by my delight at the appearance of our machine.

I had always hated the idea of being boxed up in the fore part of one of the old types of tractor, surrounded by wires, petrol tanks, and other obstructions, so when my eyes rested upon the graceful

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modern product, which was to be our mount overseas, and which I now saw for the first time, I was pleased beyond measure. It was a type best described as a two-seater fighting reconnaissance machine, having the then uncommon arrangement of seating pilot and observer so that the latter was placed some distance down the fusilage, with the pilot in front of him.

I climbed into the compartment from which I was destined to see much of life, and something of its converse, and examined it closely. Bolted to the floor was a seat, resembling a piano stool, set elliptically, so that it would swing round to enable me to sit looking sideways or backwards if I felt so inclined.

Completely encircling this compartment was a heavy metal ring on which the gun mounting was made to slide, this giving a circular range of fire, whilst at the

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same time it could be raised or lowered vertically.

I could hardly realise my good fortune, for in my most sanguine moments I had never expected such a run of lucky coincidences.

Not only was I to go overseas in the "star" fighting machine of the day; but I was to have as my pilot, a "crack" airman—and what is even more important, a friend.

All these things taken in conjunction made me extremely cheerful as I left Fanbury soon afterwards on the customary four days leave which form the official sugar coating to the pill of departure overseas.

* * * * *

On my return I found everything in readiness to leave, and on a fine morning a few days later we lined up our machines in front of the hangars, preparatory to starting on our flight to France.

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It seemed strange to reflect that those twelve machines, now peacefully ranged in the sunshine surrounded by the calm if uninspiring environment of Fanbury, would shortly be a target for shells in the strenuous scene of war.

Seated in my small compartment, still damp and dishevelled from recent farewells, I watched the mechanic swing our propeller for what would probably be the last time on English soil.

The engine roared, the chocks were jerked aside, the machine quivered, and began to run forward along the ground, gathering speed rapidly. A few seconds later we were in the air, the last strand which bound us to home was finally broken, and our adventure had begun in earnest.

* * * * *

We left the ground at what seemed to me, accustomed only to training machines,

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an extraordinary pace, and the sickly smell of oil, the vibration, the sensation of exposure which one feels in a machine without a wind screen, all combined to increase the feeling of strangeness.

I pushed my head over the side against the tearing stream of air, and watched the last traces of Fanbury fade away behind us.

There were tears in my eyes; but their presence was due to the action of the wind and was not caused by any regret at leaving; for if there is one good point about Fanbury it is its suitability as a place of departure and the gladness with which one can turn one's back upon it for ever.

We passed over many places hitherto unknown to me. Towns, villages, fields, slowly unrolled themselves beneath us as if painted upon a moving band, and at length, after what seemed to be a very long time, but in reality must have been only a few minutes, Folkestone appeared

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THE "LONG JUMP."

" . . . trailing their shadows after them along the ground. Away to our right the sea glittered vaguely by Folkestone. . . ."

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upon our right, and beyond it the sea, a shimmer of blue-grey in the distance.

Despite the wind and other discomforts not conducive to artistic appreciation, the view appeared to me ineffably beautiful. The broad sweep of country below us map-like and distinct displayed in the bright sunshine every shade of green and brown, blurred by distance yet still in contrast. Above us shone an unbroken canopy of blue, from which the sun blazed down almost vertically; but far below, drifted a few white clouds, trailing their shadows after them along the ground.

Away to our right the sea glittered vaguely with Folkestone a mixture of pink and grey blots lying beside it merging into Hythe and the open country beyond.

Over Doford my pilot shut off his engine and shouted to draw my attention to some grey cigar-shaped objects which seemed to be lying flat upon the water.

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They were "Blimps," patrolling the coast ostensibly for submarines, and our great height above them gave them the appearance of floating rather than flying. The channel seemed to be unnaturally narrow and when we reached it we were almost high enough to glide to Calais if our engine happened to fail. There was no fear of this, however, for ours was a particularly well-nourished and inspected piece of mechanism and a possession upon which my pilot placed great store, having specially picked it as being the only one in the squadron made by Messrs. ——, whom commercial rivalry forbids that I should name.

Nothing particular happened upon the journey across, and first Calais, then Audruicq passed beneath us, and at last St. Omer hove in sight, a dull grey smudge spreading like a shadow at the foot of some hilly ground.

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I had never previously been to St. Omer, and was ignorant of the position of the aerodrome, so that it was not until we had spiralled down to within a few thousand feet of it, that I noticed the line of sheds which back upon the Abbéville road, and the machines drawn up in front of them.

* * * * *

We landed in due course and after complying with certain initial formalities I found myself at liberty to "fade away" in the direction of the town.

Several other members of the squadron had already arrived by air, so we collectively succeeded in commandeering a tender and set off together in search of a resting place for the night.

I had heard that during the early days of the war the H.Q. staff had been stationed at St. Omer, and placing considerable faith in their judgment in regard to matters

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of personal comfort I was full of pleasant anticipation of ease and repose for the next few days. Of the disillusionment I will not speak. Probably things have changed since the palmy days of 1914, and the influences which have altered the whole of Western Europe have presumably made no exception in the case of St. Omer.

Perhaps the unhappy condition of provincial France is most accurately described by our landlord's three hackneyed words of apology—" C'est la guerre."

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CHAPTER II

"PREPARATION"

It resembled a segment of a golf course more than anything else.

Perhaps it was the happy similarity which caused me to look kindly upon our aerodrome at —— from the moment when, as we glided down from above, my eyes first rested upon it.

It was a tense moment, too, for the aerodrome was somewhat small and my pilot having never landed there before, I felt a disloyal suspicion that he might ram the hedge on the far side. It was afterwards, when the machine had come to rest in safety, that I first noticed the deep shell holes, grass grown, dotted here and there over the greensward, and the red warning flags planted round them, suggesting the

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inevitable " tricky " green of the suburban golf course.

If not particularly good from an aeronautical point of view it was at least a pleasant aerodrome, and from it my eye wandered away to the adjoining coppice of beech trees, and a line of willows over which the grey clustered roofs of a hamlet were visible, the thin blue haze of wood smoke hanging above them in the early morning air.

This was at least a homely spot, free from eternal poplar trees and desolation, and I rejoiced greatly, for the long blank rows of shuttered windows in St. Omer had begun to get on my nerves.

In fact we were all of us tired of St. Omer ; in its war-time dress the old French town is not a particularly stimulating place and we had clamped about its endless cobbled streets for nearly a week previously, awaiting orders to move.

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One squadron, the Xth, was already stationed upon the northern side of the ground and a row of newly-erected Bessoneau hangars ran along the southern side, marking what was evidently intended to form our future base of operations.

As we taxied down towards our new sheds, a group of mechanics, who had been sent on earlier by road came out to help swing the machine's nose round into the wind.

By the time we had climbed out and divested ourselves of our leather coats, other machines began to arrive, and within a short space of time nearly all the members of our particular flight had arrived.

Our eighty-mile journey through the morning air had endowed us with an appetite in proportion, and after having been hospitably entertained in the mess of the Xth Squadron, we started out to take stock of our new environment. We

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soon discovered that it would be some time before sufficient tents and Armstrong huts could be erected for us to sleep in, so that temporarily, at any rate, it was evident that we should have to find accommodation in billets.

So we started on a tour of the village, going from house to house, and although I do not possess conversational French of a particularly brilliant order, after several people had made abortive attempts to persuade the villagers that our intentions were more or less honest, it became clear that my linguistic performance was by far the most satisfactory.

As a result I was deputed to make such arrangements as I could to fix up billets, whilst the remainder of the flight went their ways in various more pleasant directions.

Of the numerous hectic and voluble old ladies whom I subsequently interviewed,

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and of the local " maire " with whom I exchanged unintelligible courtesies, I have only a vague and weary recollection.

It goes without saying that few of the billets selected suited the people for whom they were intended, and that the liberal price fixed as payment was afterwards repudiated by most of the landladies, and a sum considerably greater demanded by them with the most pathetic and heart-rending gesticulations. In any case my billet was a perfectly good one and the old lady in charge of it was a particularly pleasant and kindly old thing. (I still have a specimen of her signature attached as witness to a will which I made one evening in a moment of pessimism, ignorant of the fact that such testimony is unnecessary on active service.)

With the exception of domestic arrangements of this type our attention was concentrated upon our machines and equip-

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ment, and in no squadron at home has such enthusiasm and care ever been witnessed.

There is a vast difference between a forced landing which may bring you down (as happens in an astonishing number of cases) within easy range of some cheerful town at home, and one which may land you twenty miles behind the German lines, in a place where there are not even food coupons to preserve you from semi-starvation.

It was the knowledge of this that accounted for the long hours which we spent getting tappet clearances adjusted to the last millimetre, having pressure pipes tested, petrol unions fixed and doing all that was humanly possible to ensure that, all things being equal, our engines would bring us safely home.

We exercised our ingenuity upon all kinds of contrivances for increasing our comfort and efficiency in the air. Among

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other things, mirrors of the motor cycle variety were obtained and bolted to the crosspiece just above the pilot's head in each machine so that he could see what the observer was doing and *vice versa;* whilst for my own part I managed to get a compass and watch fitted in my observer's compartment in addition to various racks and shelves for maps, field-glasses, ammunition, etc.

I used to spend much time in my machine, getting myself accustomed to manipulating the gun mounting readily in every direction, and many a hard fight was fought out by me in imagination, with the peaceful environment of the flight sheds as a battle ground, whilst the summer rain poured steadily down outside making it impossible for the real thing to be commenced.

I must admit that never since that time have I felt quite the same eagerness to

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begin hostile operations in the air as I did during that period of waiting, and I was genuinely despondent because two or three days of rain prevented us from making our initial trip over the lines.

At last a morning broke clear and radiant with sunshine. Everything in the drenched countryside seemed to stir into life again under the warm rays of the early sun. There was not a breath of wind, and when, having risen somewhat late, I passed from the tiny garden which surrounded the cottage where I was billeted into the winding village street, there was still not a sign of life, except the long streams of smoke rising straight and motionless from various chimneys into the clear air above, and an old dog basking upon the cobbles in the sun.

A more perfect flying day could not be conceived, but even I, in the first flush of my martial ardour, was conscious of the

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incongruity of my belligerent intentions with the peaceful mood of Nature.

The machines, aggressively new in paint and markings, were already out upon the aerodrome, and one in particular, being that of the formation leader, was particularly gaudy with coloured streamers on the outside struts.

At first I thought that we were about to start at once for our first reconnaissance, but I was disappointed, at any rate temporarily, as the morning was destined to be devoted to practice both in formation flying and manœuvre.

The flight shortly afterwards left the ground *en masse*, and I think that as a first effort our performance was rather striking, and would have been more so but for the presence of the shell holes already mentioned.

Our six engines started simultaneously, and after a period of " running up " the

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" chocks " were jerked away from beneath our wheels and we began to move forward, gathering speed rapidly and at the same time keeping distance and line extremely well.

I think we should have completed a very pleasant spectacle, meet for the delectation of any inspecting general, and should all have left the ground at the same moment had not one of those ill-omened danger flags intervened.

The outside machine, not seeing what was immediately ahead, just caught the top of a flag pole, splintering his propeller to fragments and as we swerved round to the left on leaving the ground, I had the pleasure of seeing him jerk his machine up into the air and land most dexterously, just upon the far side of the gaping hole which had been waiting to receive him.

For some time we practised turning in formation, my pilot varying his speed

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rapidly from time to time in order to test the readiness with which the machines following could alter their pace accordingly.

We turned very sharply at times and then it was necessary for my pilot to force his pace almost to the very utmost limit in order to allow the inside machine to hold back practically at stalling point in order to give time for the outside machines to swing round in a wide curve. At the conclusion of this practice my pilot signed to me to fire the signal to disperse and we forthwith broke up and departed separately to practise manœuvres.

The practice was not so much intended for the benefit of the pilots, for they were well versed in their own craft, as to accustom them to working in conjunction with their own particular observers, and for nearly an hour afterwards my pilot circled and swerved about in the air, going through the various methods of communication

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which we had arranged whilst I tried to harden myself into complete indifference to the vagaries of the machine.

* * * * *

The value of this practice is obvious. The power to manœuvre quickly and dexterously is the pilot's greatest safeguard. Next to the capacity for shooting accurately it is the most important weapon of attack, and as in most machines, especially scouts, the gun is attached rigidly to the body of the aeroplane, the pilot's capabilities as a marksman depend almost entirely upon his skill in manœuvre.

As a defensive measure also the rapid manipulation of a machine in various positions is the most valuable asset, and a scout pilot whose guns have jammed, has of necessity to rely entirely upon his skill in this respect in order to outwit pursuers. The result is, that all flying men who wish to become proficient are compelled to

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study this art very closely, and in order to render the following chapters more readily understandable, and for the benefit of those who are not themselves practised pilots, I will enumerate a few of the more ordinary movements whereby a pilot may baffle, attack, or, conversely, corner an enemy.

These movements are more or less stereotyped, but with practice it is possible to modify and blend them together so that the machine can be made to follow a path or perform an evolution in whatever direction may be required.

The first and most important is the turn.

Almost any fighting manœuvre is more or less a turn, and machines engaged in a combat often circle round and round one another scores of times, each endeavouring to get his nose, and consequently his gun, directed at his opponent.

There are various forms of turn, quite

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distinct from the ordinary vertical turn, which consists merely of bringing a machine round with its wings perpendicular. There is the Immelmann turn, the stalling turn, the flat turn, and various other methods of swinging a machine round in a manner calculated to cause an opponent to misjudge his fire. The Immelmann turn is somewhat difficult to describe.

Imagine a machine which has completed the first half of a loop, and is practically upon its back. Having reached this position it is turned sharply to the right or left whilst still upside down, and then allowed to come out in a dive, after which its nose will point at right angles either to the left or right of its previous line of flight.

This is what is commonly known as the Immelmann turn, and its chief point of excellence as a manœuvre is that the

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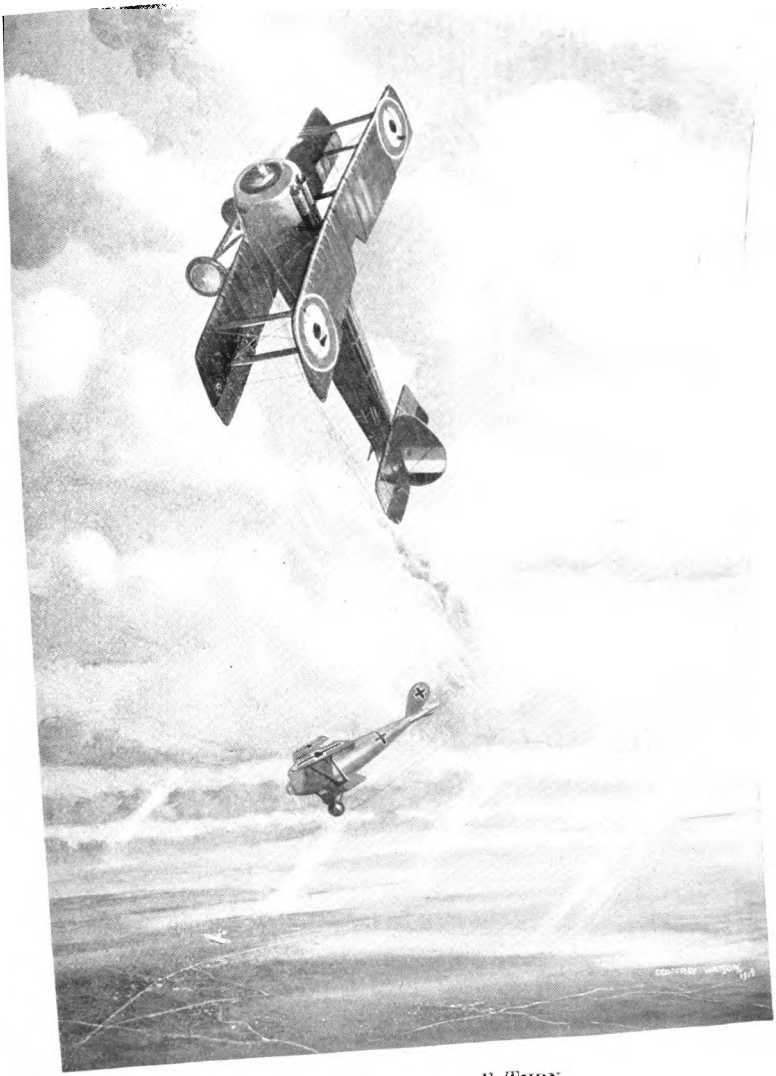

THE "IMMELMANN" TURN.

The machine is seen practically on its back at the top of the turn preparatory to coming out in a dive.

[*Facing page* 34.

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machine's course is extremely difficult to follow with the eye, leaving an attacker uncertain until the last second as to whether it is going to loop or turn.

The stalling turn is almost exactly what its name implies, and is chiefly useful on account of the fact that as the machine's nose is held upwards on the turn it loses pace very quickly and in that way an opponent is led to overshoot his mark.

The flat turn achieves the same result only in a slightly different way. On the turn the machine is not banked at all, but is held flat, so that the centrifugal force causes it to sideslip outwards.

Regarded laterally it appears suddenly to have lost nearly all forward speed, and a Hun who fails to allow for this is sometimes led to waste his ammunition upon the air some distance ahead. Perhaps the most spectacular of all flying motions is the spinning nose dive. It looks ex-

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tremely well from the ground and is liable to impress non-flying people mightily as to the pilot's skill and daring. As a matter of fact it is considerably less difficult to do than a good vertical turn, and as a fighting manœuvre is apt to lead to disappointment and perhaps disaster, for a machine diving straight can easily overtake one spinning and the pilot, being more or less in equilibrium, is able to pursue and possibly shoot down his revolving adversary.

The trick is principally useful as a camouflage, and a Hun, not over-anxious to continue a fight, is often only too glad of a chance to " beetle " off home, after watching his opponent down for a few turns of a spin, bearing with him the glorious tidings that he has brought down a British machine out of control, whereas, of course, he is merely committing the common error of his countrymen by prematurely enumerating his chickens !

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Then, again, there is the roll. I do not wish to become wearisomely technical, but briefly it consists of causing a machine to describe a complete turn laterally whilst it still continues to fly with its nose pointing in the same direction.

All these manœuvres can be modified as circumstances demand, and should not under any circumstances be confused with what is popularly known as " stunting," as this term only applies to rash things done dangerously near the ground for the purpose of eliciting admiration (?) from the spectators and apprehensive maledictions from the squadron equipment officer, anticipating the " write off " [1] and attendant hard work which usually results.

I put up with a great deal in the way of internal derangement during that hour of practice manœuvres.

Sometimes the earth would seem to be

[1] Complete crash.

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spinning round below me like a cardboard roulette disc, at others it would appear to heel up into the air above in the most disconcerting manner. My head and shoulders projected some distance above the fusilage even when seated, and blasts of wind assailed me fiercely from all sides, their direction being dependent upon the extent of our sideslip.

I felt flustered, oily, and generally knocked about, and lost a drum of ammunition over the side, being caught by a sudden turn whilst in the act of trying to practise reloading under difficulties.

Everything in the machine seemed to go wrong. The wind got under my goggles, and blew the flap of my flying helmet down over my eyes, rendering me temporarily blind.

Then I was not able to strap myself in, having found that if I used the belt it only took one complete turn of the circular gun

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mounting to tie me in an almost inextricable knot!

In consequence I had to hold on to the sides with both hands, and when I let go of my gun, it would swing fiercely round at me, on its pivot with manifest intent to strike me in the face!

By the time I had more or less overcome these preliminary difficulties it was time for us to turn homewards, and I collected my map, which was blowing about on the floor by my feet, and pretended that I knew exactly where we were, and was in complete agreement with my pilot as to what he held to be the right direction in which to fly for the aerodrome.

It was after I had fortified my failing energies with " Rosbif " and " Ordinaire " that a steadily increasing rumour which had gained currency during lunch was at last confirmed by a definite order for a reconnaissance to be made next day.

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CHAPTER III

THE FIRST FLIGHT

THE moment of initiation had arrived. As I struggled into my leather coat I experienced almost the same thrill of expectation which one feels when, armed with bat and pads, one walks to the wicket to take a delivery from a fast bowler. For once in a way I felt important—important because I was privileged to be a member of a scratch squadron, equipped with machines which were then considered the "dernier mot" in aircraft construction, and because ours was destined to be the first flight. Yes! and the first machine of that flight, which would cross the lines! The sun was still shining brightly and the after-dinner hour of 2 p.m., which under more propitious circumstances might have

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been devoted to digestive repose, was instead given over to the buzzing of engines, the careful searching of maps, the charging of ammunition drums, and all the numerous preparations which are necessary to the success of a long reconnaissance.

At last all was ready, and after my pilot and I had finally consulted as to our method of procedure and the mystic signs by which we were to understand one another in the air, I scrambled into the cockpit of our machine, Verey pistol, maps and all, disposed these items ready to hand, and proceeded to take advantage of the opportunity which my position of observer provided, to receive impressions of the things around me.

Our engine was already started and "run up," and at a wave of my pilot's hand we began to taxi forward into the aerodrome followed by the five machines which were to accompany us.

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As we bumped along across the grass to get into a suitable position for taking off, I sat ensconced in my cockpit, externally stoical, but in reality my mind thronged with a medley of almost every emotion ranging from jubilation to what I prefer to define as tension. I can still picture the whole somewhat commonplace scene in that exaggerated detail in which memory records the staging of comparatively fateful situations, and I was thus engaged when the violent acceleration of our engine suddenly recalled me from extraneous matters to more urgent practical issues.

In those days I was still afflicted with the clumsiness which the noise and vibration of an aero engine seems to encourage in beginners, and on this occasion I remember I was particularly maladroit—in fact, by the time we had reached the agreed height of 5,000 feet above the aerodrome, I was still trying frantically to fold my

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quarter-inch map over a sheet of stiff cardboard so as to expose that part of the line we were to visit. I took off my gloves to do this; immediately one of them drifted away in the furious draught down the fusilage, and my hand knew it no more until our return from the flight!

At 5,000 feet my pilot signed to me to fire a Verey light (the signal to start for the lines), which I did more or less promptly and without hitting either of the other machines behind.

I then settled myself comfortably on the little elliptical piano stool provided in my compartment, cleaned my goggles, grasped the spade grip of my Lewis gun, and tried to feel businesslike and slightly bored!

In this latter I did not succeed. All around me was the dazzling sunshine of June. Below, clearly seen through the crystal air, lay France, like a patchwork

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quilt, whilst here and there over the wide horizon drifted great white solitary clouds, having that queer effect of being suspended which they never have when seen from the ground.

I could clearly see the occupants of the five other machines, and from time to time we waved to one another to relieve the monotony and indicate our complete *sang froid*, whilst, as my pilot sat in front of me, we were able to exchange friendly smiles through the medium of our mirror.

Presently out of the blue-grey haze eastwards the ancient town of A—— began to materialise.

It was then situated on a salient in the line, and after nearly a year of bombardment looked like a vast ruin from which radiated a number of straight roads.

All round the country was bare of trees and pitted with shell holes like a Gruyère

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cheese, whilst the town from above stood out clearly in the slightly oblique sunshine as a bas-relief.

Then the attentions of Archie commenced. It is a peculiarity of anti-aircraft fire that unless it is sufficiently near to be audible, it has more the quality of an apparition than an explosion, and so it was that presently I noticed some distance ahead of us five or six little puffs of smoke all clustered together, looking much like a group of suspended snowballs.

The significance of this became more apparent when a further group of puffs sprang into being rather nearer to our right. Presently the air seemed to be fairly alive with these phantom puffs; an occasional sharp crack gave evidence of a rather near explosion.

My pilot began to swerve slightly to the right and left—the cracks became more frequent, and I noticed one or two little

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chips in the fabric of the wings where shrapnel had penetrated.

Throughout this time there was nothing particular for me to do except emulate the example of those who " also serve " by sitting and waiting and I confess the inaction was unpleasant. My mind drifted forth (like that of a certain distinguished chancellor) into a sort of " communion " with our persecutor Fritz down below. I could follow, to some extent the method whereby he " bracketed " us by some bursts above and some below. And he was now closing the " bracket " as the nearness of the fire indicated. To enliven things to some extent I turned to my Lewis gun and tried a few rounds in the direction of the German trenches in order to see whether it was working properly, which caused my pilot to jerk his head round sharply to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. At last Archie began to die down save for a

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few hopelessly wide shots, and I was able to concentrate my attention on the country ahead.

It was flat and featureless, and even in the bright sunshine showed up grey and leaden with distance. Several roads were discernible running roughly eastwards, all apparently perfectly straight until they, too, merged in the haze of the horizon.

I picked out the particular road we were to follow, and my pilot having also evidently decided that point in his own mind without reference to me, we buzzed steadily along that interminable brown streak in the direction of the town of C——, still about thirty miles away in German territory.

At last we sighted our goal—at least, as much of it as circumstances permitted, for the greater part of the town was invisible, partly owing to the thick smoke haze which hung above it, and partly because this haze seemed to have allied itself with

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a heavy cloud which almost completely obscured the town.

As it was principally in order to report on the rolling stock of the railways at this particular point that we had come so many miles, we felt disconcerted—at least, I did!

My pilot switched off and shouted down the speaking tube for my opinion of the situation. I replied in favour of making a *détour* in order to try the town from the eastern side where the clouds might be less dense, but unfortunately my pilot rather prided himself upon his capacity for cloud flying, so that presently, with engine off, we started a smooth spiral descent towards the sea of white vapour which lay below us.

Immediately we were enveloped in a dim and silent world, which for me only consisted of a vague outline of the back of my pilot's head—two rear struts of the

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centre section, and a vast white blanket which obliterated everything. The seconds dragged on to minutes and still nothing was visible.

Once or twice my pilot buzzed his engine to make sure it was still "ticking" over. Then I seemed to feel a loss of equilibrium, my body was pressed close up to the right side of the machine and a cold wind struck my left cheek. What followed I suppose was a spin. It is no reflection on my pilot's skill that this should have happened for we were fully two minutes in a world in which one might be upside down without knowing it.

In any case, after a wild, wrenching dive, during which I hung on to the gun mounting like grim death, the semi-darkness turned to brilliant light, the roofs of C—— suddenly flashed out before me—and we were righted, the vaporous cloud above us, and, not a thousand feet below the

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most unpleasantly complete view of C—— which an observer could possibly desire.

I imagine that the inhabitants of the town must have felt almost as much surprise at our nearness as we did at theirs. Anyhow, there was a pause during which nothing at all seemed to happen. I suppose, in reality, I was subconsciously counting railway trucks; my pilot must have been getting his engine going; Fritz was probably stuffing a shell into his anti-aircraft gun and licking his lips in anticipation of a nice close shot with an iron cross to follow. Then bang! Every gun in the place seemed to speak with an astonishing uproar. The air became suddenly speckled with smoke puffs, cored with flame, the machine rocked dizzily and the world below seemed to spurt fire. . . .

My pilot did a vertical turn with engine full on, and no doubt would have been thankful for the shelter of that cloud once

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again. I stood up in my seat, and, trying not to blink at each explosion, went on with my counting as best I could. That done I had an orgy of great but rather ineffective frightfulness.

Drum after drum of ammunition did I plug into the town, spraying lead about haphazard in every direction, partly because I did not wish to show undue partiality to any particular district and partly because I was too excited to keep my gun very steady. Anyhow, on the basis of 124 bullets for 15*s.* 6*d.* I got through quite a number of war bonds on the job!

We had rather an active time for a few minutes, but a good engine is something to rely upon in a tight corner, and near the ground the deflection required for an Archie gun is very great, taking some time to adjust, so that presently we were back in the cloud again, so when we saw light once more we were several thousands of feet

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from the ground and beyond the outskirts of the town.

The journey home was an uneventful replica of the journey out.

Our five companion machines naturally lost us, and, returning safely in their own time, were already upon the aerodrome when we got back.

But it was a fairly accurate report which we handed in to the squadron office that night, and after all that is the thing that counts.

On the whole it was not a remarkably eventful day for a flying officer in France, but it was my *first* day, and as such it stands out in my memory above many another, of far more doubtful issue.

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CHAPTER IV

A MORNING OVER THE LINES

"It's four o'clock, sir!" I opened my eyes sleepily, and making a rapid mental transit from the land of dreams to my billet in France, saw an orderly standing at the bedside, a lighted lantern in one hand, and "operation orders" in the other.

I stretched out my hand for the latter, and, the lantern being held conveniently, proceeded to read.

The orders were addressed to my flight commander, and ran:—"A reconnaissance, consisting of four machines from your flight, will be ready to start at 4.30 a.m. Route X——, Y—— and Z——. Any railway activity at W—— to be noted particularly."

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I handed the slip of paper back to the orderly who withdrew to wake the others.

That deadly hour of dawn, when, dragged from a warm bed, one is compelled to face the world with a scrubby chin, an empty stomach, and an impaired belief in the goodness of Providence!

I slipped from my elderly four-poster on to the cold tiled floor, and, lighting a candle, began to dress—a process which does not take a very elaborate form on these occasions.

One feels somehow, that at such an hour the artistic effect of a clean collar and tie would be lost upon unappreciative if not hostile observers; that Brilliantine would "waste its sweetness on the desert air," and an immaculate tunic might be misconstrued into an ill-timed attempt at dandyism—in fact, if it were not for the chilly nature of the proceeding I should be tempted to imitate the example of the

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late Capt. Ball, who is reputed to have flown in pyjamas and a leather coat when pressed for time at his morning toilet.

There was just a suspicion of day in the sky as I passed out into the chill air, and the strange stillness, peculiar to the hour before sunrise, brooded over the little village. A few steps brought me into the main street, which wound its way through a cluster of whitewashed cottages towards the aerodrome, and led into the main transport route between two important centres.

The sky was still bright with stars, and scarcely a breath of wind stirred, or a single sound broke the perfect stillness. It was a peaceful little place, and, even though the tide of war had passed over it, still seemed to retain the unaltering calm, which must have characterised it for centuries.

I was meditating on these things when I

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heard a shout behind me, and turned to find a friend (who shall be camouflaged as Smith) hurrying towards me.

"This is a particularly awful time to get up," he remarked cheerfully as he came abreast of me.

I supplemented his view of the situation by some epithets from my own vocabulary, and we proceeded on our way to the aerodrome, picking up some other members of the flight as we went. It was still almost dark when we arrived, and a thin veil of mist hung over the ground. The hangar doors were open, emitting a warm flood of electric light, and the mechanics were already busy, wheeling the machines out into position. Meanwhile we gathered together inside, donning our leather coats, talking over the day's prospects, and grumbling at almost everything in a good-tempered sort of way.

It was just sufficiently light to see the

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hangars on the opposite side of the aerodrome when we "taxied" out, and what little wind there was came from the west, which meant that we must take off, straight over the village.

I always hated doing this because, in event of our engine "cutting out" when we had left the ground, there would be nothing for it but a descent among the houses, followed by Blighty, or alternatively a military funeral. I think the fact of having no control whatever over the movements of the machine makes one more prone to see unpleasant possibilities, and my discomfort was also increased by the fact that the squadron commander had decreed that from the moment of taking-off, the observer in each machine should invariably sit looking backwards over the tail plane so as to leave no blind side open to attack.

It was not "mine to reason why" or I

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might have been led to wonder whence the attack would be likely to come at such an early stage of the proceedings, but I suppose it tended to make this way of sitting a habit.

We negotiated the village satisfactorily, and, having climbed sufficiently high, circled round above the aerodrome, waiting for the other machines to reach our level.

My pilot rocked the machine slightly from side to side to draw my attention, and raised his hand, with three fingers extended, at the same time glancing up into the mirror in front of him.

It was our custom, that if three machines were following I should nod my head in assent, but that if any one had fallen out of the formation I should extend fingers equivalent in number to the machines that remained. This saved the pilot having to shut off his engine to use the speaking tube, and as we nearly always either

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both spoke at once or listened together, it saved also much mutual abuse and loss of height.

Having signalled that all were present, we started off towards the lines in a close diamond formation, ourselves leading and the other three machines about a hundred yards apart.

My friend "Smith" and his pilot were on our left, and their two heads were so plainly visible above the fusilage that I could almost see the expression of their faces.

The sun was just rising and seemed to rest on the rim of the horizon, shooting its red shafts of light obliquely across the sky and turning all the East into a glory of gold.

I have seldom been so deeply struck by the beauty of colouring as I was at that moment. The dull grey film of mist, which a few seconds before had blurred the

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ground below, was suddenly transformed into a transparent veil of gossamer pink, so delicate in texture that the country immediately beneath us showed through it clearly, struck here and there by thick black streaks of shadow cast by a poplar tree or a building.

Towards the westward horizon the mist still lay in white billows which might have been carved in marble, so sharply did their shapes show up in the direct rays of the sun; occasionally, where the ground rose quickly, little knolls or clumps of trees, stood out clear and black above the mist like tiny islets in a frozen sea.

A string of kite balloons swayed about in the air to our right, marking where the line began. To my mind there has always been something rather comical about the appearance of these things—perhaps it is because they are vaguely reminiscent of the coloured sausage balloons which dingy

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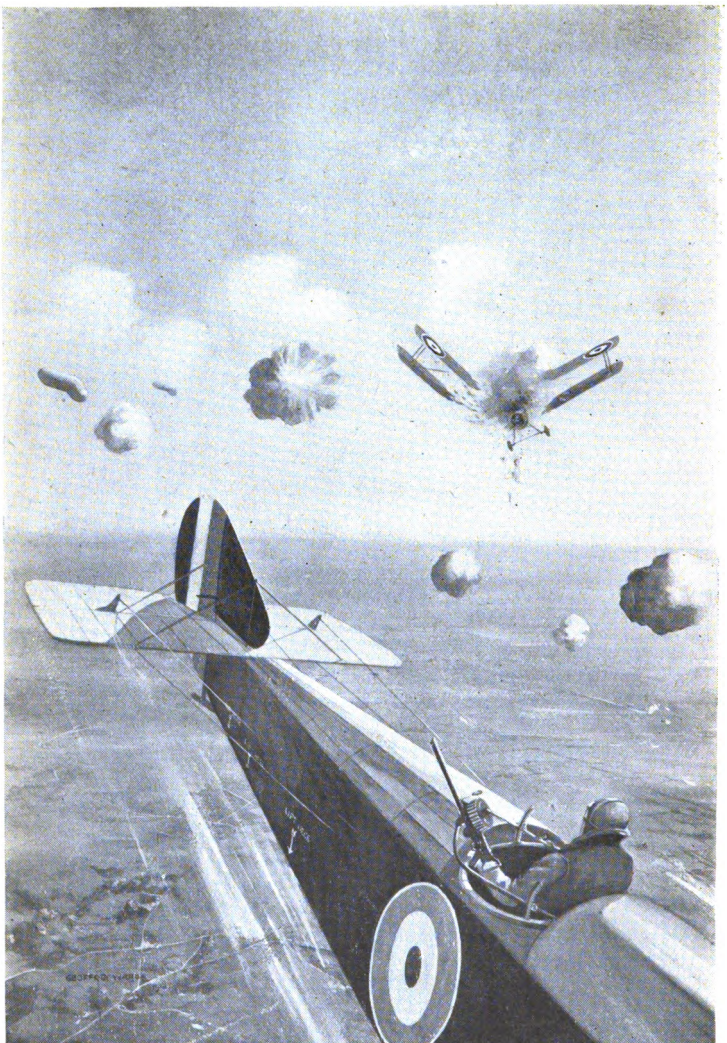

A Direct Hit.

" . . . the machine to our left was suddenly hit by a shell, full in the main petrol tank!"

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old women used to sell on Ludgate Hill—they look so blatantly obvious, wobbling about in the wind, seeming to invite a stray shell to puncture them.

As we drew near the lines the usual "Archie" bombardment started, but I took very little notice of it, for I had acquired a certain contempt for the rather futile efforts I had hitherto witnessed.

Things were becoming almost humdrum and I was beginning to wonder whether perhaps, after all, the vaunted thrills of flying were not sometimes overestimated, when the machine to our left was suddenly hit by a shell, full in the main petrol tank!

The thing happened so quickly that for a moment I was unable to realise fully what had happened, and remained horror-stricken, watching our companion machine slowly dissolve in the air astern of us.

A second before, I had been sitting

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looking backwards over our tailplane and regarding what was then evidently a substantial British aeroplane. A fraction of a second later and I saw hanging in the air before me, a skeleton machine, its wings floating away from the fusilage whilst a dense black smoke completely obscured the centre section and its occupants.

Then, quite slowly, the whole framework twisted sideways, crumpled up, and dived headlong earthwards, wrapped in a sheet of flame.

I sat watching the trail of smoke and fragments which followed it and my companions, down on their two-mile journey to the ground and thought many things. . . . It is strange, but at the time I was not so much impressed by the tragic element of the spectacle which I had just witnessed, as by the extraordinary neatness and quickness with which it seemed to have been done.

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There was something deliberate about it almost suggestive of "legerdemain," and it was only gradually that I realised the significance of that blank space in the formation following, and the gap at the mess table which would be caused by the two stout fellows and comrades of whom fate had robbed us.

I had been actually looking at the machine at the moment of impact, and this, coupled with the fact that the occupants were my friends, left a picture in my memory which I do not often care to revive.

* * * * *

I suppose I must have been sitting thus for some time, gloomily considering this evil stroke of luck when an unexpected development occurred.

My pilot had spotted a flight of monoplanes some four miles away to the south, and was rocking the machine to draw my

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attention, at the same time his upraised hand and three fingers, asked the mute question " How many ? "

I had a moment of hesitation.

Truth demanded that I should signal " Two," which would involve a long explanation down the speaking tube and probably mean returning for another machine and doing the whole reconnaissance over again later in the day.

We were already across the lines and having put our hand to the plough it seemed a pity to turn back, after getting so far.

My whole soul shouted for a day of ease with work accomplished, and my stomach cried out for breakfast at the earliest possible moment.

Between these two forces I was led to compromise by pretending to misunderstand.

I grinned up into the mirror, touched

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my gun and pointed to the monoplanes in a warlike manner as if to indicate that we were ready for them if necessary.

This seemed to satisfy my pilot that all was well, for he ceased to signal and turned in the direction of the towns of Z——, Y—— and X——, and the railway junction at W—— aforesaid.

I think I shall be immune from censorship if I here state that the railway activity at W—— was *nil;* and that the small towns of Z——, Y——, and X—— presented no symptoms of abnormal interest, except a strong tendency to smoke at the chimneys, a phenomenon probably traceable to the activities of the "matutinal housemaid."

On our way home I had rather a fright, and came near to slaying my own countrymen, when the flight of monoplanes we had seen earlier passed just over us, and tried a few playful dives. I had already "drawn a bead" on one, and my finger was about

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to tighten on the trigger of my machine gun, when I noticed the tricolour marking beneath its wings, and refrained from firing in time.

It was not until we reached home that I told my pilot the fate of the unlucky "Smith" and his pilot.

I hardly dare to tell of a certain coincidence in regard to the matter for fear of being classed among those persons whose belief in omens induces them to sling salt about at table, and perform digital contortions when passing under ladders. Anyhow, I heard the said pilot, whilst in conversation with our squadron commander on the aerodrome, on the day previous to his death, remark, in a casual way, that nothing put so much heart into him, whilst flying over the lines, as a "ludicrously bad show by Archie." Further, let the omen-mongers note, that whilst under my observation he subsequently made no

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effort, either to touch wood, mention a poet's name, say the alphabet backwards, or perform any other propitiatory rite, to which omission, no doubt, the whole of the day's misfortunes were attributable. For even airmen are strange believers in the laws of luck and chance.

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CHAPTER V

"HUN TACTICS"

ANOTHER morning of brilliant sunshine!

It seemed as if the succession of cloudless days would continue unbroken, and we should never know again the repose engendered by a week of weather bad enough to make flying impossible.

We straggled up to the aerodrome after breakfast in the mess, taking our time about it, and rejoicing in the supposition that for a brief space, at any rate, our services would not be required.

The Flight had been through a strenuous time the previous afternoon, and it was now "B" Flight's turn to take the field, or rather—the air.

We presented a somewhat unwarlike aspect, ranged about in the shade in front

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of our hangar, some lounging in deck chairs, reading weekly periodicals from home, others stretched upon the ground, writing or smoking.

The feverish activity of "B" Flight seemed to add to our contentment, and it was with an almost malicious satisfaction that we watched them stream off into the air, to look for trouble, or, to be exact, to participate in an "offensive patrol."

Personally I prostrated myself in the sunshine, with my leather coat as a pillow, watching with half-closed eyes, the smoke from my cigarette as it floated away towards the blue sky above.

The sweet scent of scorched grass was in my nostrils, and the delicious drowsiness which the warmth of the sun induces pervaded me. But for the noise of engines being "run-up" at the aircraft depôt over the way, I might have been a hundred miles from the seat of war. Presently the

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post would come and perhaps there would be letters.

I gave myself up to the contemplation of this possibility and other pleasant avenues of thought which followed from it.

It cannot have been more than half-an-hour after "B" Flight's departure that our repose was rudely disturbed by the appearance of an orderly.

Something seemed to tell me that the man's arrival boded no good; my presentiment was correct!

Within a few minutes we were bustling about like bees round a hive, and I found myself once more, regarding a rapidly receding world, over a foreground of swaying tail and rudder. There is something stimulating about the act of taking the air on a summer morning which makes one feel inclined to sing, or express the sense of exhilaration by some outward demonstration. I myself have occasionally in-

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dulged in song, but the noise of the engine has concealed the fact from my pilot, which is perhaps a good thing as I am not officially recognised as a vocalist!

The air was perfectly clear, and the country below bathed in brilliant sunshine.

As we gained height I could see miles away along the line, dark blotches of high-explosive smoke, interspersed with the white and yellow clouds of shrapnel. The infantry were having a thick time by the look of things, for right down the twenty-odd miles of trenches which were visible from our machine, I could see the earth splashed with shell bursts, whilst the smoke of hand grenades and mortars hung in the windless air, making it impossible to mistake the point at which safety ended, and the probability of trouble began.

We were bound for the good old town of C—— again, which, being a railway

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centre of some importance, was regarded by the staff with considerable anxiety at this particular time of the "Push."

As we crossed the lines I noticed a new form of aggression on the part of the Hun. It was a species of projectile, the technical name of which I do not know, but which used to be referred to locally as the "flaming onion." One could see it coming right away up from the ground, much in the same way as a rocket does.

As a pyrotechnic display it was rather amusing, but its actual utility as a weapon I have never yet discovered, for it seldom reached our height, and neither exploded nor dispersed shrapnel.

I imagine it must have been used as a "tracer" to give the line for more substantial missiles, but it cannot have been a great success, for I have seldom heard of its being used subsequent to this time.

German-France had a specially gloomy

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appearance on this morning, although I cannot remember an occasion on which it has ever looked exactly cheerful. It lay below us, a dull grey stretch of unbroken flatness, streaked here and there with silver by a canal or lake. This effect was no doubt increased by the fact that—as is often the case in very hot weather—a thin film of vapour was beginning to form in the sky eastward, making a trellis work of cloud, which although not sufficiently thick to obscure the sun, had the effect of filtering down its rays considerably.

We were not more than four miles over when a flight of six machines, of Hunnish appearance, passed near us.

They were evidently very fast and had not the slightest difficulty in describing a semi-circle round us; which they did with the evident intention of taking stock of our formation before deciding whether to attack or not.

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As is usually the case, discretion got the better of their valour, for they glided quietly away, and I watched them spiral earthwards, towards an aerodrome which was visible below.

I was as yet unseasoned in the art of dealing with Huns, and dismissed the incident from my mind, under the impression that I had seen the last of them.

In this supposition I was doomed to be mistaken.

The Hun in the air, like his brother on the ground, is a thoughtful person, prone to rely upon strategy rather than dash, preferring to wait until he has obtained some definite advantage either in numbers or position before risking an encounter.

On this occasion, being only six to four, they had not considered the odds sufficiently in their favour and had no doubt gone down to earth to talk over some more

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formidable propaganda, and fortify themselves with strong beer.

We reached our objective, the town of C——, and circled above it, dodging the Archie, whilst I focused my field-glasses, and made a careful examination of such evidences of military preparation as would be revealed by the disposition of rolling stock in the railway stations, and the presence of transport on those roads which led from the town towards the various sections of the line.

This proceeding occupied a considerable time, and involved our descending several thousands of feet to get a better view, as the light was no longer so good as it had been earlier in the day.

I had just completed my observations, and was in the act of returning a sheet of notes to my pocket when, as was natural, I turned my eyes in the direction of home. It is very fortunate that I did so, for I had

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hitherto been so engrossed in my work that I had not kept a very good look out for hostile aircraft, and my pilot also was occupied in keeping in touch with the other three machines, and at the same time manœuvering to give me a good view of the town below.

At a distance of about six hundred yards were four enemy machines, which must have crept up unobserved whilst we were at work. They were passing along in a direction parallel to our line of flight, and had already opened fire, for I could see the spirts of flame from the muzzles of their machine guns.

My pilot, in his capacity of flight commander, signed to me to give the signal for attack, and in a few seconds I had sent a coloured light spluttering up into the air, and started my gun crackling away merrily.

It was a splendid opportunity for us,

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as the enemy were an ancient and almost obsolete type of machine and would stand a poor chance against our more modern efficiency.

We swung round in a semi-circle, and rejoicing in the good fortune which had provided us with such an easy prey, sped towards them *en masse*.

There was not a moment of hesitation on the part of the enemy. Their noses went down like lightning, and whatever may be said about their speed flying level, those machines put up a pretty good performance in the way of a dive. Every wire on our machine sang to the tune of the wind, the engine raced, and I could scarcely keep my head above the gun mounting owing to air pressure as we dived after them in pursuit, but still those four tails kept steadily ahead of us.

Further and further did my pilot jam his controls forward, and I heard his front

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gun eating up belts of ammunition with great rapidity.

Then, an Archie battery, which had been peppering us with shots, the wideness of which was due to fear of hitting their own countrymen, suddenly ceased firing.

My pilot "flattened out" and waved a warning arm upwards, at the same time kicking his rudder bar so that we spun half round.

I did not see what followed—it was too quickly done for that, and the top plane spoilt my view, but I have the impression of a pair of spread wings and two large black crosses, which swept not twenty feet over my head.

Even then I did not fully grasp what had happened, but the instinct of self-preservation which dwells in every one prompted me to action, and jerking up my gun, I poured a drum-full of "tracer" ammunition at our assailant.

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I could see the thin stream of smoke, which gives the trail of bullets the appearance of a jet from a garden hose, play upon the Hun's fusilage for a moment. Then he was out of range, slipping away towards the ground at a hundred miles an hour.

I had no time to judge the effect of the encounter, for there was a convulsive movement of the machine which jerked me back into my seat, and my pilot turned sharply to avoid another flash, as Hun number two, having missed his dive, passed on his way earthwards.

The machines immediately to our right and left experienced a similar attack from above, and a couple of Huns, who met with as little success as their two predecessors, went home thwarted, but no doubt hard at work inventing tales of prowess for the benefit of their superior officers.

Thus the little *coup* fell through. I have not the slightest doubt that the whole

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scheme was thought out most carefully by some Hun commander down on the very aerodrome to which the six machines which we first noticed descended.

It was a very simple plan, and one which, with better execution, might have been most successful.

The four antique specimens of aircraft which had approached us near C——, were clearly a decoy, sent with instructions to engage our attention, and then dive for an Archie battery at a certain point, just keeping sufficiently ahead of us to encourage pursuit. Meanwhile, high up above the said battery hovered four machines of the Fokker type waiting for the moment when, partly hidden from us by our own top planes, they could swoop down unobserved, and win everlasting glory by bringing down an enemy in what a sportsman would consider a rather cold-blooded manner.

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We were troubled by them no further, for the Fokker only strikes once, and we got safely back to our own lines battered, but cheerful, a few wires shot through, a few spurs splintered, but with the feeling of confidence which springs from danger successfully encountered.

This was almost my first experience of the wiles of the Hun airmen, and it is typical of almost every other occasion upon which I have come in contact with these gentry.

There are always the same evidences of preconcerted action and co-operation between machines, but there is also almost invariably the same automatic way of carrying the plan into effect, which makes it devoid of all spontaneity or initiative, and at the first reverse or unexpected development the whole manœuvre collapses.

It would be foolish to imagine that

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Germany does not sometimes produce more or less efficient pilots, but the flying man, who makes fighting in the air a sport, and flying a pastime, is seldom to be found the other side of the lines.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCERNING A GERMAN CAMOUFLAGE

THE summer offensive was nearly a month old, and already the steady pressure of the Allied Forces was beginning to tell its tale upon the ground below.

Day by day we noted from the air the gradual rolling back of the enemy from the network of zigzag lines, which had once been considered an impenetrable barrier, and watched the dark waves of our infantry, like tiny ants, break upon the German trenches, and pass on through the smoke. At some points the barrage hung so thickly, that we could scarcely see what was taking place, and had it not been for the fact that the men's shadows showed up black against the brown earth, it would have been almost impossible to distinguish them from above. Our work was almost

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unceasing, as was the case at that time with every branch of the flying service. New positions had to be photographed, new ranges found for the guns, new movements of the enemy noted; so great, in fact, was our activity that at about this time a Hun airman flew across the lines and dropped a message bag containing a note, couched in remarkably colloquial English, which ran: "Why don't you give your confounded Flying Corps a rest?"

German machines, massed together in large numbers, were continually on the alert, patrolling up and down the lines, to prevent our reconnaissance squadrons from gaining information as to what was taking place on the other side. That a counter-attack by the enemy was imminent might be inferred as a natural consequence to our advance, but upon what particular point it would be concentrated still remained doubtful.

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As a result, we spent many long and tedious hours, searching the ground for indications of the movement of troops; but whatever changes of position were made by the enemy must have been carried out by night, and with that peculiar secrecy and camouflage which is characteristic of the Teuton strategist; for, with the exception of a few trains and the ordinary road traffic, no signs of anything unusual were observable.

We were beginning to feel that our efforts were rather futile, and I, at any rate, was becoming heartily sick of handing in reports the substance of which was of little more interest than a railway time-table, when one evening " B " Flight returned with the information that they had spotted a large enemy bivouac.

We listened to their tale that night in the mess with mingled envy and incredulity. It appeared that whilst flying over a

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certain wood about ten miles beyond the lines, they had noticed a number of spirals of smoke rising from the trees. The wood was one of considerable size and extended over an area sufficiently large to conceal a great number of infantry or other troops, whilst, as the columns of smoke rose at very frequent intervals, it might be surmised that the place was closely occupied and that the fires were evidence of culinary operations. As all this was merely conjecture and would need further verification, we were not surprised when next morning orders were received for a further investigation of the matter.

We were greatly elated at the prospect of an adventure which promised important results, and there was much discussion as to what method it would be best to pursue, to ascertain with absolute clearness what the wood contained.

The weather was the factor which ulti-

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mately influenced the decision. It was a morning on which the sky was dark with scurrying clouds, and a stiff west wind blew, making our canvas hangars swell out and strain at their guide ropes, while the wind indicator streamed out straight and rigid in an ominous manner.

For some time it looked very much as if we should be unable to go at all, but at about 11.30 the clouds lifted slightly, and although they were still spread across the sky, dark and threatening, there was sufficient height to give us a certain margin of safety. We taxied out on to the aerodrome, three machines in all, with a mechanic on each wing tip to prevent our being blown over by the wind, which came in short vicious puffs.

It was a very small formation from a tactical point of view, but for purposes of reconnaissance more manageable than a larger number; we had no intention of

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being drawn into a fight unless it were forced upon us, and our orders were to make the information our principal object, and to avoid coming in contact with the enemy if possible.

We got off the ground in good style, and I watched the aerodrome and adjacent village decreasing in size and importance as we circled round and round, fighting our way up through the wind-bumps towards the dark masses of cloud above.

We had scarcely gained half our usual height when trailing wisps of vapour from the lower layer of clouds began to obscure the ground and great drops of moisture from the rain-laden air congealed upon my goggles whenever I poked my head over the edge of the cockpit to note our progress.

The other two machines having picked us up and fallen into position on either side of and slightly behind us, we headed

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towards the lines, contriving to keep just below the dead level of the clouds, but sufficiently high to gain cover from any drifting banks which happened to be floating underneath the principal stratum.

These banks of clouds occurred at very frequent intervals so that we could seldom get a view of the country below for more than half a minute at a time, and often remained hidden in the moist gloom and vapour for so long that I began to wonder whether we had not climbed up too high to find another opening. I spent most of my time during this period, glaring back over the tail plane into the dense obscurity behind us, expecting every moment to see the dim shape of one of our companion machines in the act of ramming us from the rear.

During the brief intervals of light I had to concentrate my attention on the ground in order to pick up our bearings and

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acquaint my pilot of any alteration in course which might be necessary.

Under ordinary circumstances this would have been a rather difficult matter, but we were all very familiar with the locality and seldom had any doubt as to our exact position.

The clouds concealed us from Archie as we crossed the lines, and once on the other side we laid a straight course for the wood, keeping hidden from observation as far as possible.

Not a single enemy machine did we see, and, with the exception of a few patient artillery "busses" wheeling methodically round and round above their targets, had practically all the navigable air to ourselves.

It was our intention to take the occupants of the wood by surprise.

They would be almost certain to have relaxed the rigid camouflage which had been observed during the previous day, as

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the weather was now so bad that ordinary reconnaissance work was suspended, and they would consider a visit from hostile aircraft most improbable.

Under these circumstances we should possibly find evidences of the presence of troops either on the roads or in the fields adjoining their hiding place, and might even catch them in the act of debouching towards the lines.

The wood lay close to a road which formed the principal transport route, running north-west to what we will call the northern sector of this part of the line, and diverged in a V fork from another road running in a south-westerly direction towards the southern sector.

The presence of troops on either of these two roads might, under certain circumstances, indicate a concentration of men by the enemy upon either of these two points, and would act as a clue to the por-

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tion of our front at which the long-expected counter-attack would be delivered.

At length, through a gap in the clouds, I saw, far ahead of us, a long black streak, which lay like a smudge on the landscape. It was the wood.

I leaned forward over the gun mounting and, touching my pilot on the shoulder, pointed ahead. He nodded to signify that he understood, and swung the machine round so that its nose rested in line with our objective. We had just time to note that the two other machines were with us when the clouds closed in again, and with tail down and engine full out we started to climb up into the thick layer which hung above us so as to avoid any chance of being observed from the ground, before arriving over the wood.

It now became merely a matter of judgment to calculate the time which would

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elapse before we should reach our destination, and to keep a perfectly straight course.

I sat quite still, waiting and listening whilst the engine droned on and the mist swirled past. I stretched out a groping arm and gripped the handle of my gun, almost as one might grasp the hand of a friend. At last the droning ceased, and was replaced by the steady mechanical click of rocker-arms; our nose went down so that we seemed to be almost vertical, and in a straight dive we passed from the clouds, and shot towards the ground at a speed which made the whole machine quiver, and every wire spring taut with the strain.

My pilot had judged things well.

Immediately below us lay the wood, seeming to expand with every second as we sped towards it. A rapid glance over my shoulder told me that the other two

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machines were already out of the clouds, although some distance from us.

Then the real business of the day began in earnest.

Down we swept, until the tree-tops stood out sharp and distinct, and every clearing and passage-way through the undergrowth became clearly visible.

Leaning over the side of our machine, with glasses focused, I could make out a number of trails of smoke which the damp wind swept away in long streamers, almost as soon as they rose above the trees, but of transport or troops there was not a sign, either in the fields, or upon the roads, not a horse picketed upon the grass land, or a supply waggon within a mile.

I peered down at the dense screen of foliage as it waved to and fro below, and searched each open space with the utmost care, but the result was the same.

We circled about for two or three minutes

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feeling dispirited and baffled, and at last, convinced that there was nothing to be gained by further delay, began to climb upwards once more with a view to getting home with all speed. In spite of our lack of success, one fact of interest had so far been elucidated by the morning's work—that the bivouac was a blind, and the camouflage a dummy camouflage.

The fires, and their attendant streamers of smoke must have been purposely lighted with a view to deluding our observers and through them the staff into the belief that troops were being concentrated upon the northern sector of the line.

Charcoal burners do not abound sufficiently plentifully to give credence to the theory that the smoke could have been the result of their operations, and there is no other valid cause for lighting fifty-odd fires, of a particularly smoky sort, in one wood.

We had almost gained the cover of the

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clouds once more when we noticed four machines stretched out in line. They were not more than a mile away, and were flying straight towards us so that it was impossible to estimate their speed or tell to what type they belonged.

We were heading westwards towards the lines and as they were coming from the north at right angles to our line of flight, we though it best to make a slight deflection so as to avoid meeting them, in obedience to our instructions, for their appearance strongly suggested that they were Huns.

I turned round in my cockpit, and sat regarding them suspiciously along the sights of my Lewis gun, whilst they gained ground at an alarming pace, spreading out like a fan, as if to encircle us, and all the time keeping their noses in our direction so that we were unable to distinguish their nationality.

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As they gradually crept up within firing distance, I had a strong tussle with myself to refrain from pulling the trigger in response to a voice which whispered, "Get one in first and trust to luck," whilst decency prompted me to wait to see their markings.

Every now and then my pilot would look back over his shoulder apprehensively, or shoot an inquiring glance up into the mirror above him, but still I remained tensely waiting, every nerve strung, and my finger pressing tentatively upon the trigger. At last, with a sort of relief, I saw the stream-lining[1] in front of the leader's propeller, and my finger, tightened finally. Zip-zip-zip-zip . . . Like nothing so much as the noise of a stone rattling down a corrugated-iron roof, the little gun jerked out its deadly stream of

[1] This refers to a conical projection peculiar to the propeller bosses of Hun machines.

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lead, whilst the sights roved over and across the target.

One drum finished. A breathless fumble for another whilst the wind tore at my helmet straps and behind my goggles as the pilot forced the machine's nose down almost into a dive, and the engine's buzz became a shrill scream.

Nearer and nearer rose the earth towards us, whilst roads, tree tops, houses, villages began to sweep by, seeming almost to graze our wheels.

Then, either because the pace was too hot for them, or because they did not like to face the backward fire of our machine guns, the Huns began to drop away to the rear and I emptied a final drum in their direction by way of a salute, and turned round to take in the situation. We had been driven many miles out of our course, and were heading towards the south, with very little height to preserve us from

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Archie, and our formation badly broken up. I noticed that one of our inter-plane struts had been shot through by a bullet, which showed that our pursuers had been equipped with guns, firing through their propellers, and one drift wire hung severed and flapping in the wind.

On the whole we had not come badly out of the encounter, and a piece of good fortune accrued to us from our difficulties, for, chased southwards as we were, and far away from the wood, on our homeward journey we happened to pass over the village of T—— which lies upon the main transport route communicating with the southern sector of the line.

The place was packed with troops, a fact that was clearly visible to the naked eye; for no attempt had been made to conceal either men or transport from observation from above.

Either there had not been sufficient time

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or the enemy must have relied upon the bad weather, for the roads were littered with waggons, and great numbers of men and horses were collected in and near the village.

But for the fact that I had only one or two drums of ammunition left for emergency use, I might have put up some amusing work among them with my machine gun.

But this was not to be ; at least not now. The friendly cover of the clouds enveloped us once more, and held us until the lines were left far behind and the day's "show" almost ended.

As we passed swiftly homewards, hidden by the protecting darkness, I had leisure to meditate upon the Hun and his works ; indeed, I could not fail to appreciate what a good joke it would have been for some ingenious Teuton, had our bombing squadrons wasted tons of high explosive

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upon the inoffensive undergrowth of that peaceful wood, and allowed the little coterie at T—— to go unscathed. As it happened there *was* a joke after all, but whatever laughter it occasioned, can have found no echo in T—— or its immediate vicinity.

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CHAPTER VII

THE RAID

With a cloudless sky and a perfect morning, we were busily engaged in getting together our gear in preparation for the day's adventure. The bivouac at T—— which we had spotted on the previous day was to be bombed, and without delay, for there was a possibility that it might be broken up and dispersed before we could get to work.

In view of this contingency an early start was essential, and as a result we were now provided with an opportunity of judging the artistic properties of the much-vaunted "pearl-grey dawn," without the option.

It is difficult to assume the combative mood of a giant refreshed at the eerie hour

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of 4 a.m., and more particularly a "giant refreshed with wine," as at about that time "refreshment" begins to give place to a dreary and cynical aftermath.

I stood with my hands in my pockets, watching the first hint of dawn creeping athwart the eastern sky, and shivering cheerlessly as I waited, possessed of an immense craving for coffee, and a steadily increasing conviction that the lark is a misguided bird, and the early worm richly deserving of its reputed fate! Drawn up on the aerodrome adjoining our hangars were the bombing machines of a particularly heavy and torpid type, considered in those days to be the *dernier mot* in the "straffing" line and held in deep respect by the inhabitants of neighbouring German towns. They loomed out from the half-light like the great bats of some primeval age, whilst beneath the planes of each was dimly discernible a cluster of ponderous

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"eggs" whose destined nest we hoped would be found at T——.

In our relatively faster, lighter and more agile machines, we had been detailed to act as escort to these bombers on their journey over the lines, and to see to it that having arrived at their destination they would be able to "unload" their bombs without interruption.

This done, it would fall to us to shepherd them safely back again, meanwhile taking the brunt of any substantial form of protest which the Huns might choose to make.

As the bombers wallowed slowly off into the air, one after another, we remained on the aerodrome, watching their stately ascent, and delaying our start so as to give them time to struggle up to a fair height, before following in pursuit.

Our machines were six in number, and we were armed, in addition to our usual equipment, with cameras, so that the

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result of the bombing might have substantial verification in the form of photographs, and to provide, of course, against the natural modesty of the bombers, leading them to minimise the extent of their achievements.

They were already at a good height when at last we began to leave the ground, and were visible, spread across the sky above us, in the form of a triangle whose apex pointed towards the lines.

It was some minutes before we reached their height, and even then it seemed to me that the ground was still unpleasantly near, and that, climbing at the present rate, this state of affairs would be likely to continue indefinitely.

The bombers, however, being evidently inured to the terrors of Archie considered that a satisfactory height had been reached, and I was greatly surprised when presently a coloured light floated up from the leader's

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machine, as a signal for us to fall into line.

Taking up a position a few hundred feet above them, we accompanied our convoy, swerved and circled to keep our pace sufficiently slow for them, as they staggered along under their great burden of explosive towards our objective.

Although the sun had not yet shown itself above the horizon, the infantry were already beginning to attack at several points, and my mind went out in sympathy to those black specks below, and the stout hearts that animated them in their heroic struggle.

If the hour of dawn seemed chill and spiritless to us, comfortably ensconced in our machines above all the noise and dust of the conflict, how much more so to them, faced with dangers ever-present and far more tangible. No one in the flying services can have anything in his heart but

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the deepest respect for the fighting man on the ground. Between the infantry in the trenches, watching the progress of an aerial battle, and airmen on contact patrol above, following the struggle on no-man's land, there is a bond of admiration and understanding; for each sees the other at his supreme moment and can appreciate the steadfastness and courage with which he meets the test.

As we neared the lines, it took all our loyalty to those good bombers to keep us from yielding to the temptation to climb to a safer height above them when the Archie bombardment began.

The Huns knew well what message those broad spread wings above them carried, and the tornado of shells which greeted our appearance testified to their apprehension.

The great size and wing span of the bombing machines, and their unwieldly manœvres, rendered them an easy target

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to pick up and range upon, and Archie was not slow to take his opportunity in a right good spirit.

The backwash of this engagement affected us considerably, and we bobbed about in the shell-bumps so merrily that I forgot to regret my belated breakfast, in the channel-like vagaries of our machine, but the bombers kept steadily on without the slightest sign of perturbation—in fact, I did not see their leader swerve once until T—— hove in sight.

It is very difficult to know what to do in a machine when, on a long and tedious flight, nothing is required of one but to cultivate spontaneous quiescence. I have never entertained the idea of trying knitting or crochet-work, or any of the other pursuits which are considered a profitable occupation for leisure moments, and so I am usually left with my own speculative thoughts for company.

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I have often envied my pilot with the trim, homely board of shining instruments in front of him, requiring constant attention and care. The steady movement of the needle of the air speed indicator, the question of oil and petrol pressure continually confronting him from two little clock-like discs, the engine revolution counter, most anxious care of all, upon whose unchanging good will our whole freedom depends—a needle which he must watch as ardently as a roulette player, with all at stake, watches the pointer which may make or ruin him.

It was not until the roofs of T—— were almost immediately beneath us that the first sign of active opposition in the air was apparent. Eight enemy machines of the "R"-scout variety were visible, bearing down upon us from the north at a great pace, and when first sighted must have been several miles away. I did not

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immediately recognise them as Huns, but my pilot, more highly trained in such matters than I, spotted them at once and, rocking the machine from side to side, jerked his head towards them warningly.

It was then that I began to wish that we had yielded to the temptation to escort the bombers from a greater height. At the moment of sighting the enemy we were only about 400 feet above the convoy, and any defensive manœuvres we might wish to carry out, would be greatly hampered by the presence of their massive bodies immediately below, whereas the enemy had not only the advantage of a slightly greater speed than our own, but also a good 1,000 feet of height from which to select a favourable opening for attack.

They were almost upon us when the first bomb was dropped by our party. It was well aimed ; I could see that it took good effect in the village below, and I was torn

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between a desire to record the fact by a photograph and a still stronger wish to test the adjustment of my Lewis gun before the enemy got to close quarters.

Apparently their principal object was to protect the bivouac in the village from attack, for, disregarding our presence completely, they dived straight down at the bombers, almost before we could make any attempt to intercept them.

The bombers were evidently aware of their intention, for they wasted no time in unnecessary calculations, but released their bombs *en masse*, and houses, roads, and (I regret to add) fields, spouted up in great black and yellow plumes over the whole extent of the place so that it seemed suddenly to have come out into a scorbutic rash of explosion and smoke.

Whatever troops thought to find shelter and safety in the secluded little town of, T—— must have suffered a rude awakening

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for almost immediately the place was swarming with the tiny shapes of men, scurrying about like ants when their nest has been disturbed. Fortunately an observer in one of the other machines had time to photograph the scene, for I was almost at once engaged in using my gun to the utmost advantage. I had only time to get rid of about half a drum at one of the scouts as he flashed down just astern of us, towards the bomber immediately below.

I saw his dive, and followed him with my fire until he came in line with our companion machine; then I ceased, and in the second which followed I witnessed the end of our unlucky *protégé*.

The Hun continued his descent, almost vertically until he was nearly on top of his victim, firing all the time with his forward gun. Then when his bullets had taken effect, he flattened out at the last minute,

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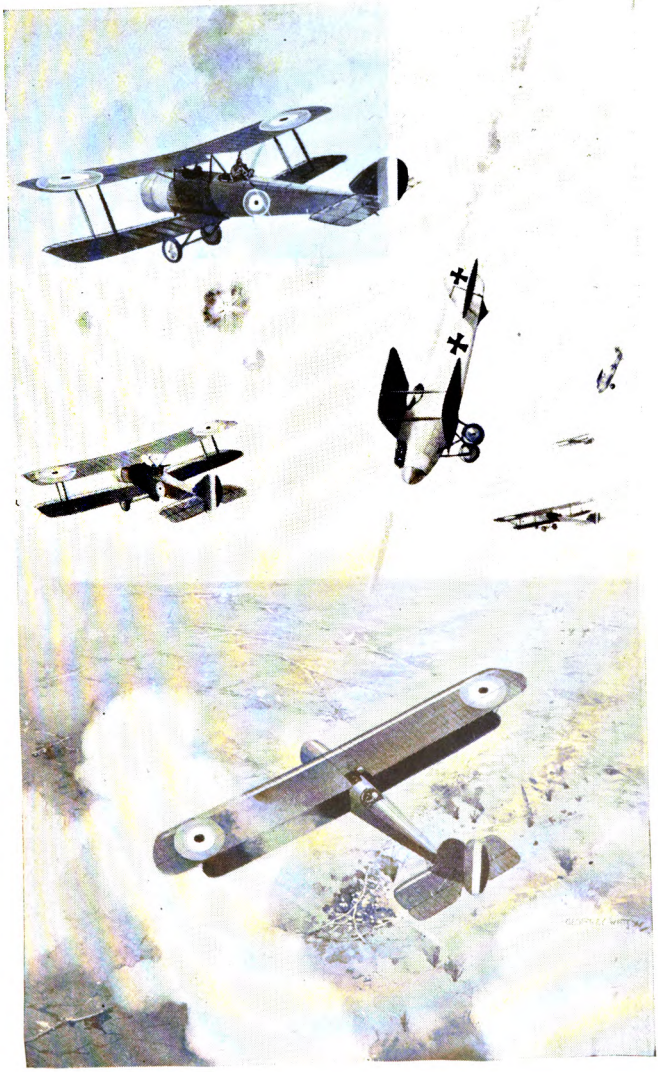

THE RAID.

" . . . one of the scouts flashed down just astern of us, towards the bomber immediately below."

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just in time to avoid a collision, and shot past into safety.

The heavy machine, with both pilot and observer evidently knocked out, turned slowly over, and stately even in its end, seemed to hover for a moment and then to spin swiftly earthwards, leaving a black column of smoke in its wake. The pilot must have been in the very act of falling when he released his bombs, and must actually have followed them down on a part of their way to the ground for just before he struck the earth I saw two great fountains of *débris* and smoke spurt upwards to meet him, as the machine crashed among the houses and was lost to view.

My pilot had also watched this catastrophe, and like myself must have suddenly taken an intense dislike to this Hun, who had so easily disposed of our comrade; regardless of any other opponent he dived down in pursuit of the scout who was

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already in the act of attacking a second bombing machine.

I do not know whether it was due to my pilot's front gun, or to the observer in the bomber attacked, but almost within the first few rounds fired in the fight which followed, the Hun was hit. He must have ended by falling forward on the control lever, for his machine suddenly stalled, and, diving downwards with engine full on, he troubled us no more.

The rest of the acts of the bombers, and all that they did, are they not written (in small print) upon some back page of the scroll of fame ?

Adhering to the sound principle that " he who fights and runs away is likely to be available for subsequent hostilities," we proceeded to make a strong bid for safety by heading in a body for our own lines—the bombers in front, and ourselves forming a rearguard.

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The Huns continued to harry us with great persistence, and I was destined to have one more unpleasant experience before our wheels rested on the aerodrome once again. One of our machines, whose pilot (now unfortunately a prisoner) was a great favourite with all the Flight, began to lag behind, due to a sparking plug of his engine becoming oiled up. As he started to fall more and more to the rear the Huns closed in upon him, in accordance with their usual custom, intending to make certain of at least one more machine before relinquishing their attempt.

I had been looking forward at the country ahead and was quite unaware of all this, but my pilot, who as flight commander was always on the look out for the other machines, saw what was happening and decided to intervene immediately. To one knowing the facts it was an action of only ordinary courage, but to me, abso-

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lutely in ignorance of what was going on, it was an act of the most inconceivable daring. Without the slightest warning our machine swung quickly round directly back upon its original course and headed straight towards our pursuers.

For one breathless moment I suspected my pilot of insanity, but before the realisation of the truth had dawned upon me we were already in the thick of it.

What followed exactly is still very indistinct in my memory, neither can I recall the sequence of the manœuvres by which we ultimately eluded the Huns, the spins which we did or the sideslips whereby we baulked their fire, but I have a recollection of being very active and busy for some vital minutes, before at last with nerves wracked and ammunition exhausted we shook them off for good.

With two much-shaken and isolated machines we headed steadily homewards

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in the wake of the main formation, now so far ahead as to appear a mere cluster of vague specks in the western sky.

I sat in my cockpit limp and perspiring, reflecting pessimistically upon my lot and the circumstances surrounding it, while we glided smoothly downwards on the last ten miles of our journey.

It was not until the aerodrome was reached, and I was once more free of my flying coat and helmet, that I began to realise that the sun still shone, that the grass was still spangled with the fresh dew of early morning, and that not far away was a breakfast, whose delights only an "early bird" could fully appreciate.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE AIRMAN

FLYING—especially flying in France—abounds in what the novelist would call "psychological moments."

There are moments of paralysing uncertainty when for a few seconds life and death hang in the balance and one's mind seems almost to pierce the veil of eternity, and moments of the keenest exhilaration when the machine becomes as a living thing, responding to the controls like a well-trained charger.

I have often wondered—as I expect have many people in pre-war days—in what condition of mind a man, outside a novel, faces an emergency which provides the two melodramatic alternatives of probable death or dishonour.

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It has always seemed to me that it would be very difficult to emulate the self-possessed demeanour of Martin Harvey in "The Only Way," and make a graceful exit from the world murmuring, "This is a far, far, better thing than I have ever done."

The question as to whether it is the best thing, or the worst thing, seems to me to shrink into complete insignificance beside the undoubted fact that it is the *last* thing.

The advantages of this attitude, moreover, are considerably reduced from the flying man's point of view by the fact that the air provides no sympathetic audience of tearful admirers to supply the necessary moral stimulus, and things happen so quickly that a properly sustained effect cannot be arranged.

Hence the manner of one's going seems to me to be a quite unimportant consideration.

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I do not think that, as a pilot, I have ever received such vivid impressions of the air, as I did during my time as an observer in France. It may be partly because the experience was more or less novel to me, or because, as I have said, there were no technical details of engine control or fuel pressure to divert my attention from the essential facts of our position during every stage of a flight.

In those days I was wont to bemoan my fate, and look enviously at pilots resplendent with their broad spread wings, whereas I wore only the "shock-absorber's" single pinion, but I have never since regretted any one detail of that first initiation into flying, and its true complement—fighting in the air.

In many respects the position of an observer is a peculiar one, and, from a psychological point of view, more interesting than that of a pilot.

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The feelings and emotions of the ordinary flying man of the pilot genus are almost insensibly transmitted to his machine, and find reflection in every movement of his control lever.

If he be gay and light-hearted, full of the lust of battle and the joy of life, he may leave the aerodrome with a heart-stopping "zoom," and, bounding up into the air, head hot-foot for the lines in search of a fight.

If he be depressed, and counsels of prudence hold sway, he will probably make his way sedately and circumspectly, avoiding unnecessary evolutions and acrobatics, treating Hun aircraft with respect, and generally expressing his personal feeling of dulness in the action of his machine.

Not so with the observer!

He is the sport of the winds of heaven and subject to the caprice of whatever pilot he happens to accompany. No one inquires

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tenderly as to his gastronomic condition before turning a loop into a spin, and a spin into an Immelmann turn, or allows the question of his personal inclinations to influence the general programme to any marked degree.

He is there, to all intents and purposes—a gun and a pair of eyes—his psychological condition and calmness of mind are taken for granted.

And yet the mentality of an observer is a thing complex and full of strange elements of thought.

Who can fathom the thoughts of a man rushing headlong towards what his reason indicates as certain death, whilst he himself sits like the driver of a runaway horse with broken reins? Or, again, who can express adequately the feeling of disappointment he experiences, as with gun already levelled he is compelled to watch an enemy retreating in safety, knowing

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that one more turn of the machine would have brought the Hun within the range of destruction ?

Several times in my life, have I sat, crouched in my seat, with the machine diving wildly earthwards, and my eyes fixed on the back of my pilot's head, wondering whether, in that last round, a bullet may not have reached him. These moments of doubt are spared to a pilot, who, whatever his risks, is generally perfectly well aware of every move in the game.

There is necessarily something far more strained about the mental attitude of the observer whose active volition cannot control his destinies to any great extent, and who, being suddenly confronted with a situation, has to force his mind to accept it, than there is about a man who deliberately takes a certain course of action, and continues in it with the certainty of one of

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several known issues resulting. I do not hold any brief for the observer, stout fellow as he usually is, neither do I wish to draw any comparison between the courage of observers as against that displayed by the majority of pilots. I have seen too much of the heroism of each to care a rap one way or another; but I think that the comparative mental outlook of these two great components of the aerial fighting unit is a most interesting study.

* * * * *

Persons who have no experience of the air are often led to form an entirely wrong conclusion as to its relative strains and stresses.

There is the horror-stricken agriculturalist amongst whose turnips you may happen inadvertently to crash, who, as he directs you towards the nearest telephone (usually about four miles away), remarks confidentially, " I durs'n't go up in one of they

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things, maister (indicating the crash), not if you was to offer me a thousand poun'!!!"

In direct opposition to this worthy's estimate of the risks of flying, is that of the valiant lady, with a brother in the R.A.F., and a finger in every war-work pie, who asserts, if possible in the presence of an admiring company, that she is "simply dying to go up!"

These, however, are extreme opinions.

The average person, who, when in conversation with an airman, wishes to probe the sensations of flight at its most exacting moment, usually opens the subject by inquiring, "What did it feel like the first time you went up?"

Well! My own first flight was taken in company with a pilot of the good old school, who considered flying a thing to be taken with care and in small doses, so that when, as has frequently been the case, I am

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asked this preliminary question, I find myself at a considerable disadvantage.

Sometimes I have desired to appear valiant in the eyes of the questioner; and deserting the path of truth, have been led to tell a tale of the most nerve-racking description.

To my credit let it be said that these occasions have been rare indeed, and only the result of great provocation.

In the majority of cases a strict sense of accuracy has compelled me simply to reveal the plain, unvarnished facts, and thereafter to retire into conversational obscurity.

Why on earth one is expected to experience such portentous feelings on the occasion of one's first flight I fail to understand.

From a war-worn airman it is a question as likely to produce a startling reply as if one were in a position to ask the Ancient

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Mariner what it "felt like" the first time he went out in a boat!

In my opinion, and as the result of some observation of the careers of airmen, I am inclined to hold the belief that the flight most prolific in sensation and thrill is the airman's *last* flight.

The few long-drawn seconds when with crumpled wing or blazing petrol tank he tumbles down through a mile and a half of air towards death or oblivion or——

Who can tell what thoughts rush through a pilot's mind at such a time?

Few survive these "last flights," and those who survive them seldom care to talk of their sensations.

* * * * *

The air, to the flying man, is exactly what his temperament happens to make it. This of course does not apply to the "shock-absorber," but, as I have said, his case is peculiar.

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It can be a medium of passage as smooth and lacking in disturbance as travel in the most luxurious Pullman car.

On the other hand, it may become a field for the most devastating and nerve-racking acrobatics.

In the course of my experience as an instructor of flying I have taken up several scores of pupils for their initial trip in the air, and have noticed carefully the effect of flying on each of them. In the majority of cases I have dealt gently with these untried votaries of the air; for the embryo pilot is a tender plant and must not be discouraged in his first impression of his future occupation.

Sometimes, though, on a morning when the freshness of the sun-bathed country beneath, the clearness of the air and the delight of unrestrained motion have caused me to forget the inexperience of my "freight," I have given vent to my

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feelings by throwing the machine about somewhat wildly in the air, thereby enjoying at the public expense, sensations far more pleasant than those which in the days of peace one used gladly to obtain on the "scenic railway" at sixpence a time.

On these occasions I have sometimes noticed a pair of gloved hands reluctantly desert the "dual control" lever, and grasp the centre section struts in front of me. I have "put the wind up" my pupil! Reluctantly I am recalled to duty, and once more, on an even keel, we circle sedately round the aerodrome.

But it is remarkable how quickly the average pupil develops a desire to "stunt."

After the first few "solo" flights, he begins to feel dissatisfied with the ordinary motion of straight flying and seeks others of a more ambitious nature.

In this he is often only following the natural process of his own development

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and in the fulness of time becomes a good pilot.

Sometimes, however, he starts his "acrobatics" prematurely, and, yielding to this ill-judged rashness, is subsequently collected in an ambulance.

Of flying men overseas it is not easy to make any criticism. For the most part they are beyond it. It might be possible to compare the various types which one encounters in France, but such a comparison would be merely superficial, for there is only one type of flying man that matters to-day—the universal type which has made our air services supreme. But there is one quality, the detection of which by a mere external scrutiny, is beyond the powers of the greatest psychologist. That quality is courage.

Like "fame," it is "no plant that grows on mortal soil," and whilst it is sometimes lacking in persons who seem externally the

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most courageous, yet, frequently, some small, unprepossessing individual of mild demeanour, conceals under his unwarlike exterior the most heroic spirit.

I remember how once I realised the utter fallibility of judgment in this respect, when standing on the aerodrome near a machine which had just returned from beyond the lines.

A group of flying men was gathered round it with the M.O., and they were removing something from the gunner's cockpit of the aeroplane.

It was the body of C——, a diminutive observer whom I had mentally classed as a thorough-going "shock-absorber" in the worst sense of the term and a person of little account anyway in any case.

The machine from which they lifted him was riddled through with bullets and stood, almost a wreck, with splintered spars and torn fabric to testify to the fierceness

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of the fight, for C—— had died at his gun, fighting to the last.

To fully appreciate the true meaning of such a death I must ask the reader for a few seconds to take the place of C——, the shock-absorber, in this, his last unequal fight.

Imagine yourself thousands of feet above the ground, in the cramped wind-torn seat of a fighting aeroplane, with medical aid fifty miles away, and your life-blood fast ebbing from a bullet wound.

Picture yourself in this extremity battling with the deadly sickness resulting from loss of blood, forcing your gradually fading senses to concentrate upon fast-moving hostile machines, which are swooping, vulture-like, upon you from every quarter, haunting you to the end.

Imagine that even when on the border-land of death you must still find strength to rattle back a dying challenge from your

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machine gun to save your pilot and machine from destruction and the enemy from triumph.

Think of this heroic struggle against long odds, and perhaps you will realise the immortal courage which dwelt in the meagre body of C——, the shock-absorber, and others like unto him, who have, in the very face of death, upheld their motto, " Per ardua ad astra."

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CHAPTER IX

A TALE OF TWO TAILS

At the time when our forces were performing the customary great advance in the region of a certain muddy stream on the western front, I first became assured of the long-suspected fact that I was not designed to pose as the hero of a modern novel. It was what we of the R.A.F. describe colloquially as a "dud" day, and I sat surrounded by the official austerity of the squadron office, invested with the mysterious powers of "orderly officer," wishing heartily that my duties had not supervened to prevent my joining in the general exodus which had taken place in the direction of the little town of K——, where a good tea and some relaxations were obtainable by those who could catch the mess tender.

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I was actually engaged in censoring the men's letters home, when a glance towards the window showed that outside the clouds had broken, and great patches of clear blue sky were beginning to appear overhead.

I rose from my seat, glad of some excuse, and strolled out into the cool, rain-washed air to take stock of things.

It was evidently going to be a fine evening, for already the sun was pouring through on to the rising country away to the west, and the clouds were beginning to bank away northwards, leaving the whole southern sky, clear and intensely blue. I lighted a cigarette, and, tempted by the freshness of the late afternoon, was in the act of deserting the delights of censorship with intent to wander over to the flight sheds when my ear caught the faint tinkle of the 'phone bell in the office behind.

I hurried back and took up the receiver.

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A voice—the wing commander! Respectful vibrations ran down my spine as I replied that I was not Major D——, merely the orderly officer.

"Find him at once and ask him to ring me up," said the Chief tersely, replacing his receiver, and thus terminating a somewhat uncongenial conversation.

With all haste I hunted up the squadron commander in his billet, knowing intuitively the purport of that suspended telephone message. My mission fulfilled I repaired to the mess in search of my pilot. I found him reclining in an armchair, reading the papers and enjoying the feeling of somnolent indigestion which descends upon those who absorb Vin Ordinaire at lunch time, and proceeded to disperse his sleepiness by the information that we were "for it" again.

Apparently the sudden improvement in the weather had also been observed by H.Q.,

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and apprehending an attempt on the part of the Huns to send some reconnaissance machines over our lines, offensive patrols had been ordered to start work immediately all along our front.

For several days past the weather had been particularly bad for flying, and each army was anxious to ascertain what movements had been carried out by the other side during the interval. As a result our machines were required not only to perform reconnaissance duties over German territory, but also to act as a barrier to any of the enemy's machines attempting to cross our lines.

It fell to our lot, on this occasion, to be detailed for defensive work, and the message quickly came through that we must be ready to start out at once for patrol duty between two named points of the line.

When the substance of this order was officially promulgated, there was no little

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excitement and searching of heart among those of the flight who had not yielded to the lure of the teashops of K——.

In the first place, there were only about two hours of daylight left, in which to prepare for and carry out the patrol; in the second and last place, there were not enough pilots left in either of the flights to form a complete unit.

After some hustling, and overflow of pent-up feelings, the available pilots of two flights were pooled, and a hybrid formation, composed both of A and B Flights left the ground with all haste for a cooler and less troubled atmosphere.

We mounted upwards accompanied by five other machines, and through the air, crystal-clear, I could watch their smooth movements, and note the grace and symmetry of their lines as they circled with us, climbing towards the now calm azure of the evening sky. The country below

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seemed to glow in the slanting rays of the sun, and the landscape, spreading away to the distant horizon, stood out fresh and detailed as if seen through the medium of a magnifying glass.

Over everything brooded the peace of a summer evening—over the green refreshed earth the little grey patches of clustered cottages, the yellow cornfields, the dark beechwoods, even over the lines themselves.

In such circumstances the world seems to be an unspeakably good place to be in or above, even though a few miles away the devotees of *kultur* happen to be doing sacrifice to their god.

The stimulating feeling of the machine's swift passage above the earth gives to the senses a zest, which, for those who have once come to know and love the air, nothing can ever equal; for the steady drone of the engine is as the voice of a companion, which dispels loneliness.

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In the first half hour we patrolled smoothly up and down our beat above the lines without the slightest interruption of any kind.

I had been ordered to render a report upon any enemy movements which were noticeable, and in order to justify my presence in the machine I strained my eyes hard in the direction of the German lines in the hope of spotting at least a solitary engine or perchance a transport lorry or two to insert in my report, for what is an observer if he observe nothing or if there be nothing to observe? He might as well be a policeman in the Kingdom of Heaven, and assuredly the name of the man who sees nothing is not numbered amongst those that stand for promotion!

For some time I pursued this harmless occupation. We were at a great height above the lines, and Archie's abortive

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attempts to reach us were more a distraction than anything else. I could see the whole complicated machinery of modern warfare in operation upon the broad panorama below.

Miles back from the lines the occasional flash from the muzzle of a big gun blinked from behind its screen of boughs and vanished. An inter-battery combat was taking place between our field artillery and a Hun emplacement, whilst above them wheeled the machines from whose wireless flowed the controlling influence of the fight.

Over a mile below I could see the tiny shape of a scout on contact patrol, flitting over the trenches like a mosquito, whilst here and there long banks of smoke rolled between the lines, moving slowly forward on the breeze.

Liquid fire and gas were being freely used below—those supreme triumphs of

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the enlightened Teuton chemist, whereby a race which cried out in horror at vivisection conferred upon the world a means of inflicting death upon human beings in its most terrible forms—burning and suffocation.

At last, as I was beginning to get tired of taking an inactive part in the proceedings, I noticed something which caused me considerable satisfaction. About a mile ahead, three enemy machines, with unusual boldness, were crossing our lines; not only crossing them, but, what is more important, recrossing them after having obviously slipped through unobserved and collected whatever information they required.

They were several thousand feet higher than we were and seemed to be in rather a hurry to get home. Undoubtedly they had just noticed our formation below.

We were flying along the lines at right angles to them, and my pilot altered his

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course slightly so as to intercept them when they reached their own side of the lines.

At first it seemed almost certain that we should catch them up, for they were flying with their noses well down, and although this added greatly to their speed, it caused them to lose height very rapidly.

As we drew nearer I was able to examine them more closely.

They were a type of machine described by various names, but most commonly known as the "Two Tails" on account of a peculiar arrangement which provided two nacelles for a pilot, observer, and gunner, and which tapered away into two distinct tails behind. They were rapidly coming within range and, continuing in their present direction, it was clear that we should meet them about four miles on their own side of the lines, when in view of our superior numbers and the extreme unwieldi-

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ness of their machines the advantage would lie very largely with us.

Our formation was in perfect order and after nearly a week of restraint we felt fresh and quite ready for a scrap as, with engines all out, we roared after them, intending to make certain that the information they had obtained should get no further.

The Huns, instead of altering their course so as to fly away from us, put their tails down and started to climb, still heading straight towards home.

It seemed to me the most futile manner in which to attempt to avoid having to fight, as it would simply give us the opportunity of obtaining a position of advantage just underneath them, without having to lose height over enemy country to do it.

In this respect I did the German pilots an injustice.

Although the "Two Tails" was a type of machine with many defects, now dis-

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carded and practically extinct, it had one very remarkable feature—its capacity for climbing steeply.

I do not know upon what mathematical grounds the fact is based, but in spite of a very meagre range of forward speed and a particularly cumbersome and ungainly appearance, this machine's extraordinary climbing powers had to be reckoned with.

The result was that when we reached the spot where I had anticipated that the encounter would take place, the "Two Tails" were still ahead and nearly 1,000 feet above us, moving slowly it is true, but irritatingly inaccessible for the moment. After considerable manœuvring, during which our formation got badly mixed up, we succeeded in reaching a height equal to that of our enemies, at the same time placing ourselves across their line of retreat.

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We were now quite eight miles behind the German lines, and as we swung round to confront our prey, I realised that the manœuvre had been a mistake. Our backs were turned towards Germany and straight into our eyes poured the dazzling rays of the sinking sun.

The whole western sky was a brilliant saffron colour, against which background the "Two Tails" showed up weird and dim of outline whilst the silhouette effect made it difficult to tell whether they were flying towards us or away, and to estimate the range with any degree of accuracy was almost impossible.

From my position, at the back of our machine, it was difficult to fire my Lewis gun without running the risk of hitting the propeller, but I managed to loose off a drum at the Hun on the extreme left by firing between the planes. This was a risky proceeding requiring great care owing to

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the fact that the two principal flying wires of our left-hand wings ran almost across my target.

It was possibly in consequence of this that my firing produced little result except a rather stimulating noise.

I had hardly completed the drum when the enemy decided to alter his tactics, and in the face of the impending destruction which was sweeping down towards them they proceeded to scatter, one to the right and two away to the left.

We had no time to arrange ourselves in accordance with any definite plan but each pilot singled out a Hun according to his fancy, and dived in pursuit. My pilot stuck to the Hun at which I had first fired, and side-slipping beneath the machine which followed immediately behind us, dived after him, swerving right and left to puzzle the enemy gunner if he chanced to be shooting at us.

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From the first it seemed to me that the pilot of the "Two Tails" was suffering from nerves. This was not surprising for his position was not very pleasant, and the machine must have been an uninspiring mount on which to fight.

Anyhow he made the fatal error of turning his tail or rather tails, in our direction, and diving perfectly straight down with engine full on.

His machine was arranged like a "pusher" with the nacelle in front, and this meant that his observers were both absolutely useless—"shock-absorbers" in the true sense of the word—for they could not fire backwards at us without hitting their own machine, and must have regarded the controller of their destinies pretty unfavourably for the few seconds during which the dive lasted.

My pilot began to blaze away with his front gun as we followed hard after them,

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and I was beginning to watch for the Hun's inevitable collapse when the gun spluttered and jammed!

It was not the first time by any means that this had happened to us in the air, and so there were no original epithets in which we could do justice to the situation. I saw my pilot rise in his seat and, extending a fumbling left hand out towards the cartridge belt, tug frantically at it, but I knew by experience that he stood as much chance of putting the gun right in the middle of a dive as he had of winning the Iron Cross!

After a few wild attempts he collapsed into his seat and I began to get ready for my turn.

We were now right up behind the Hun and another few rounds would have gone far towards finishing him had we possessed a forward range of fire.

Our diving speed being very much

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greater than that of our opponent we soon caught him up and drew alongside at about 100 yards distance.

To decide the fight one way or another now rested with me.

In the flash of understanding with which the mind at crucial moments seems to absorb the minutest detail in one glance of the eyes, I saw the great clumsy pusher, painted dull grey and marked with broad maltese crosses in black.

In front projected a boat-shaped nacelle above which three very Hunnish heads were visible.

I could see the flashes of flame from the muzzles of two venomous machine guns as they opened fire, and almost at the same moment I returned the compliment, with gritted teeth and a feeling that if ever I shot with intent to kill it must be now. It was at this point that the Hun pilot woke up.

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A Tale of Two Tails.

"Suddenly he pulled back his controls, and in a moment the 'Two Tails' reared up into the air. . . ."

[*Facing page* 151.

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I do not know whether he woke up of his own accord or whether one of my bullets helped him in the process, but anyhow he seemed to decide all at once, that drastic action was necessary.

Suddenly he pulled back his controls, and in a moment the "Two Tails" reared up into the air, performing something as nearly resembling an Immelmann turn as a machine of that cumbersome type is capable.

I do not know quite what it did then, for the machine disappeared from my range of vision completely for a second and then reappeared above the top plane, sliding sideways across our path to the right at a mighty pace.

My pilot, whose view was interrupted by the wings, looked up and down and round completely mystified and then turned to me for guidance.

I pointed quickly towards the right,

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where the "Two Tails" was visible again, performing an even more rapid edition of his usual dive about 600 yards away, with a dense trail of blue smoke [1] following in his wake like an enormous feather.

We were now only about 4,000 feet from the ground and more or less lost, but the keenness of the chase possessed us and our appetite for Huns was whetted by disappointment.

My pilot turned the machine quickly round and once more we pursued our prey and its comic triumvirate of occupants.

One of the three heads in the "Two Tails," however, must have contained some elements of sense, and this time the

[1] People—even flying people—are prone to imagine that because a machine goes down with clouds of smoke pouring from its engine, that it has necessarily been hit by a bullet. Almost any type of air engine, after a long continuous dive, will emit a large quantity of smoke when started again or when turning over. This fact has often misled pilots into believing that a machine has been hit, whereas its engine is merely "oiled up."

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dive was not as aimless or ill-judged as its predecessor.

Almost immediately below us was an anti-aircraft battery of no little repute. It was situated in a small wood, and, although we did not at first recognise it, was well-known to every flying man on that front on account of the extremely accurate shooting which it usually put up.

Towards this battery the Hun dived for all he was worth, whilst we, thinking of nothing in our excitement except the destruction of our enemy, followed recklessly after him.

For some moments nothing happened. Whether or not the battery fired any ranging shots I cannot tell, but suddenly the most ear splitting report I have ever heard rent the air and a great sheet of fire sprang into being on the right of our machine, seeming to envelop the whole sky.

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For a second the blinding flash of light cleared my mind of every sensation. The machine seemed to be lifted bodily into the air whilst a great cloud of yellow smoke swept past us. Then with a sickening movement our nose went down, and once again I realised to the full the dramatic character of suspense.

What had happened I could only guess! I was not even sure whether I had the correct number of legs and arms—such minor details held no place in my mind in the face of the awful question—what had happened to the machine?

I gripped the gun mounting with both hands, for I was not strapped in, while the machine rolled over sideways and the earth seemed to circle dizzily round. My gun swung across on its mounting and struck me on the head, but, I hardly noticed it, for my eyes were focussed intently on our right-hand planes.

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A strip of torn fabric hung fluttering in the wind, a number of minor rents showed in the canvas, but otherwise they seemed to be intact. Then I felt the machine jerk and "straighten out" and knew that my pilot's controlling hand was still guiding our course, and—thank heaven!—after a few moments of uncertainty, earth and sky resumed their normal position and I was able to slide back into my seat, and judge the narrowness of our escape.

The right-hand side of the machine had rather a speckled appearance, but was otherwise apparently undamaged; our engine was still running smoothly; there was no petrol flowing about to indicate that shrapnel had penetrated either of the tanks, and except for a growing lump on the back of my head, I was otherwise *in statu quo*.

What of my pilot?

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The situation was still rather too acute for me to bother him with personal inquiries on the speaking tube, for Archie, encouraged by one good shot, was still very active, which in view of our low altitude meant that it was necessary to manœuvre in order to baffle the Hun's fire.

The other members of our original formation were hopelessly lost, and the "Two Tails" seemed to have faded into space, a fact for which I was extremely grateful.

I fished out my map from the locker, and, I am ashamed to say, with rather erratic fingers, spread it out on my knee and tried to pick up our bearings.

From what I could make out we had still about 12 miles to go to reach the lines and already the sun was near the horizon, and the western sky was tinged with the red glow of sunset, while the shadows of

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evening stretched along the ground, darkening the world below.

Something of the hostility of the German territory beneath us seemed to have imparted itself to the air, for the place seemed gloomy and ill-omened and I longed intensely for the security of home.

Glancing up into the mirror I looked at my pilot's face.

It was white and drawn.

Could it be the shadow of the gun mounting or what was the matter ?

At that moment he caught my eye and nodded reassuringly, at the same time giving a tight-lipped smile.

I signed to him that I wished to speak, and switching off the engine he lowered his head to the speaking tube.

" Are you all right ? " I shouted.

" Hit in the ankle."

" Badly ? "

" Don't know—hurts a lot."

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"Can you hold out?"

"Think so—you all right?"

The engine went on again and we trailed slowly homewards.

That endless journey!

I sat, as the minutes dragged on, my mind crowded with the wildest conjectures, every possible disastrous outcome of the situation flitting insistently through my brain.

I had no dual control—what if my pilot fainted from loss of blood? Our chances of escaping alive would be infinitesimal.

The engine might be damaged and fail before we reached our lines—to be a prisoner—down there in that gloomy place. My imagination completed a picture in which black bread and *sauerkraut* loomed darkly.

These and a hundred other variations of the same thoughts haunted me on the journey home as the light gradually faded

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and the world below grew dim and indistinct.

I got tired of inaction and grasping the centre section struts drew myself between them towards my pilot, pushing with my feet against the circular gun mounting behind, whilst the wind tried to tear me from my place and its pressure nearly stifled me.

I managed to get one arm over the back of the pilot's seat, and clinging tightly to this support, I stretched out my left hand and found that if need be I could just reach the control lever and the engine thumb cut out which was fitted on it.

This gave me more sense of security and I was able to shout into my pilot's ear from time to time to find out how he was getting on. We travelled in this way for some time until it became clear that we should reach the lines without further serious mishap.

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So, through the gathering darkness, we sped towards safety, and never did ship-wrecked mariner hail the harbour lights with more satisfaction than I felt when at last the aerodrome hove in sight once more — a vague grey blur pricked here and there by tiny points of light from the hangars where late work was in progress.

As we spiralled down, the broad ray of a landing flare broke out and spread across the ground to guide our descent as thus at last we came home to roost.

I slid back into my cockpit thanking Providence, and utterly fagged out, as the lights rose to our level, and, flattening out, we skimmed swiftly over the grass and to rest.

My pilot was too done up to taxi in and we lifted him out carefully and carried him across to the M.O.'s hut where his leg was examined.

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Part of his flying boot had been torn away at the ankle where a shrapnel bullet had hit him, badly bruising the bone, but not penetrating it, a fact for which we were indebted to the thick cowling of the engine through which it had first passed.

Before I went to hand in my report my pilot insisted on first inserting several details which he had noticed on the way home, thus completing a duty which, to be frank, I had been too concerned to attend to sufficiently.

This was only one small detail among many which increased the already great respect which I had for my pilot's coolness and presence of mind, and I went on my way to H.Q. with my report, rejoicing greatly—for confidence in his pilot is to the observer as a tower of moral support.

Thus ended one more day's "shock-absorbing"—a day which tested my absorbent capacity to the utmost.

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These experiences may go far to dispel the idea which is largely held by persons unversed in flying matters, that an observer is — what his name implies — merely a "looker on."

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CHAPTER X

NIGHT FLYING AND OTHER THINGS

To fly at night—to listen to the droning of an engine which one cannot see—with the cold night wind against one's cheek; to watch the long streamers of flame trailing from the engine's exhaust into the blackness behind; surely this is as weird a sensation as modern science can provide.

Above spreads a wide dome of star-spangled darkness, and below, the earth, an unknown mystery, opaque—invisible.

I have watched the moon rise whilst night flying, and from a height of several thousands of feet have seen its pale face many minutes before it was visible to the slumbering earth below; and later I have seen the broad semi-circle of light creep forward across the landscape like a

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silver fan, just touching tree tops, houses, spires, so that the ground seems to be dappled with tiny flakes of light.

Then, as the moon rises full above the horizon the country below begins to take form; dark smudges of towns or woods appear; here is a river, like a silver snake; little detached wisps of cloud shine in the horizontal rays; and there perhaps the sea, far distant, is spanned by a silver pathway.

Very tranquil is the appearance of the world below, bathed in the white serenity of moonlight—nothing more impressive than to see a wide vista of cloud, transformed by the moon into a fairyland of snow-peaks with shining mountains and fleecy white and great black valleys of shadow stretching away in seemingly endless array until they meet the hard line of the horizon and are merged into the blackness of the sky above. Apart from these spectacular effects, night flying

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demands of a pilot far greater vigilance than flying by day, and there is little time for more than an occasional glimpse at one's surroundings. Appropriately is the pilot's compartment of a night-flying machine named "the office." Draw in your head from contemplating the vast majesty of the night and you find yourself in a small, petrol-scented box, dark and stuffy, save that here and there the minute rays of reduced light from an encased electric bulb shine down upon the slowly moving pointer of an instrument, or illumine a series of revolving phosphorescent numerals on the compass disc.

Ready to your hand are a number of levers, taps, and many "gadgets" which reveal themselves to the touch although invisible. If the night is dark and overcast it is well to dispense with the electric lights as even their dim radiance, tends to dazzle the eyes; their faint light impairs

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the judgment and renders even more vague the faint shapes which constitute the outside world.

If need be a finger pressed on one of the little buttons on the switchboard will bring into being the light for any instrument as required, and if this fails there are the phosphorescent markings of the dials to fall back upon.

If there happen to be stars in the sky or broken clouds above, or better still, a moon, the difficulty of keeping a straight course and level keel is reduced to a minimum, but sometimes, when the sky is black and unbroken, instruments become almost the only guide.

On dark nights such as these it is practically impossible to tell by instinct whether one is even the right way up or not—at least until the fact becomes unpleasantly patent owing to the erratic movements of the machine.

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The sky above looks just about as black as the earth and there is no horizon, which when visible is a better guide to the pilot than any instrument ever made. One seems to be suspended inside an immense black sphere without top, bottom or sides, and unless haply some light below or permanent feature of earth or sky becomes visible, the pilot is in much the same condition of groping uncertainty as a blind man who has lost his stick.

It is upon these occasions that the value of accurate instruments and the power to use them to advantage is apparent, and it is only as the result of long practice that the habit of controlling a machine by the aid of mechanical devices alone, can be acquired.

Instinct plays very little part in assisting a pilot to fly at night, but once the preliminary difficulties have been overcome aerial navigation in the dark presents no

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insuperable obstacles, although it is not among the most pleasant of occupations.

The duties of the air service night-flying squadrons are divisible into roughly four departments :—

Home Defence,

Long-Distance Night Bombing,

Short-Distance Night Bombing, and

" Other Things,"

the last section of activity embracing various duties of which I am not at liberty to speak fully for fear of injuring the tender susceptibilities of D.O.R.A. !

As to the first duty—Home Defence—the majority of people, Londoners especially, are almost as well informed as I am, for although the technical side of the work is not revealed to them, the thunder of anti-aircraft fire, the resultant spurts and flashes thousands of feet above, the broad dazzling rays of searchlights, slashing the sky into the semblance of a post-impres-

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sionist picture, make it difficult for the most dormant imagination—an imagination often assisted by the crashing descent of an adjacent bomb—to fail in forming a picture of the night pilot's lot above in the bewildering mixture of light and darkness.

For my own part I prefer to be in a position clearly to distinguish "the broad green land, the mighty sea, and the great, eternal sky,"—the dark medley of unknown things called night flying has never attracted me, and such experience of the work as I have had has caused me to look with respect upon those who, under the sometimes ambiguous and even disparaging term "Home Defence," are performing one of the most dangerous and arduous duties of the War.

I have only flown at night in England upon two or three occasions, and on my first attempt was unlucky enough to

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happen upon a night when circumstances were not particularly favourable.

The sky was dark and unbroken and a damp gentle wind rendered the process of steering a compass course additionally complicated, whilst a heavy pall of cloud completely spread over the whole sky at about 3,000 feet. It was at an instructional aerodrome, and several flares having been lighted to facilitate matters I was ordered to make a circuit in a practice machine and land. Having completed this preliminary manœuvre satisfactorily I was told to continue to practise landings until I became more or less proficient.

I achieved my first two or three circuits with success, and, emboldened by this first experience, was tempted to slightly extend my sphere of operations.

Keeping one eye on my instruments and the other on the golden circle below, which represented the patch of light thrown by the

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landing flares, I started climbing, turning slowly all the time so as to keep home in view.

I was becoming quite confident, and tried switching the instrument lights on and off to see how the luminous markings showed up in the dark, while the altimeter slowly registered the increasing height.

My engine was running very smoothly, and remembering that one of my friends had been fined forty shillings and costs for lighting a pipe in the street at night, and (*horribile dictu !*), making opprobrious remarks to the special constable who remonstrated with him, I started making a survey of the surrounding country with a view to obtaining statistics of any local delinquency in this respect !

For some time I looked about me for signs of illumination, but the inky blackness yielded not so much as a visible twinkle so far as I could ascertain, at my

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height of about 3,000 feet from the ground; much less would it be possible to a Hun at his customary height of 20,000 feet or more.

At last, having exhausted the interest of this pursuit, I glanced automatically over the side, expecting to see the steady glow of the landing lights, "leading kindly" towards safety. Instead my eyes encountered a black pall of nothingness.

There was nothing above, nothing below, nothing on either side of me except a dense unbroken wall of blackness.

For a moment my understanding halted before the problem as to what natural phenomenon could have suddenly extinguished those lights, a second before shining brightly on my left.

I regret to confess that for a moment I descended from the lofty standard of immobility, which reputedly forms the basis of the true airman's character, and

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for some unaccountable reason my hand strayed towards and pulled one of the small levers which controlled the wing-tip flares.

The light illumined—*nothing !*

Instead it was reflected back into my face in the same way as the headlights of a car, when the driver strikes a patch of fog upon the road. Without knowing it I had climbed into the clouds, and, like an unmentionable fool, had produced a pyrotechnic display at the W.D.'s expense, wasting material and exhausting my emergency means of landing if I failed to reach the aerodrome.

I descended from the clouds with a diminished self-respect and an increased perception of the fallibility of human effort.

Nobody commented, subsequently, upon the fact that the wing tip flares were burnt out and I did not seek to encourage discussion on the subject.

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My other night flights at home were uneventful, and a description of them would be tame compared with the tales of gallant deeds which have already appeared in the press from time to time, so that I now turn to the second heading, and less exploited theme of Night Bombing overseas.

At the time of which I am writing, night flying, and, especially night bombing had not been cultivated to any very great extent. There were squadrons which bombed at night, and worked at it right lustily, but the sphere of their activities was nothing like as wide and far-reaching as that of night-flying squadrons in France to-day.

Long-distance bombing squadrons, that is, squadrons which made a constant practice of ministering to the needs of remote German towns, and doing practically nothing else, did not exist, partly because a machine suitable for this work had not then been produced and partly because the

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comparatively small number of trained pilots available made it necessary for each night-flying squadron to perform every sort of night duty required.

This meant that a night-flying pilot had to be an extremely versatile person. He had to be prepared to bomb Cologne, bomb the trenches, bomb a village, bomb a gun emplacement, bomb anything, in fact, and in addition he should be prepared to cope with the demands of that last and more mysterious range of duties—"other things." To-day, a long-distance night-bombing squadron is one of the most highly specialised branches of any service in the War. The training of each man for his particular duty is long and exacting, for in practice the work has to be carried out under the most trying circumstances conceivable.

A machine whose wings would go far towards spanning Whitehall, which is

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capable of carrying passengers whose numbers may run well into double figures, and which can take bombs by the ton, is a very different proposition from the old two-seater bomber of earlier days.

The pilot in these new machines, important as his position naturally is, ceases to be the only member of the crew upon whose training and judgment the success of the whole operation depends. To assist him, there are several skilled persons capable of performing minute calculations and able to read strange instruments with complete *sangfroid* and composure during the most deafening Archie bombardment imaginable — who can work decimal calculations to any number of places without worrying in the least about the will-o'-the-wisp rays of searchlights flickering over them as they sit crouched beside their little tables at the bottom of the fusilage.

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Such people are a modern product which this War has evolved out of the ruck of things.

In the old days—the good old days before invention and accuracy had reduced night flying to an exact science—the pilot performed most of these duties himself, with one eye on the compass and the other on the searchlights below, sideslipping artfully from time to time to avoid their dazzling beams as they spread deadly feelers of light over the sky, and all the time trying to bear in mind how much these manœuvres were throwing him out of his course.

What bombs were dropped were loosed off more in a fine spirit of optimism than as the outcome of any very elaborate calculation, and even then the results were usually astonishingly good.

From these old squadrons the modern light bombing squadron has been evolved,

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and as the result of a ripened experience and increasingly scientific methods, their results to-day, far outshine anything previously attempted.

Three or four trips in a night are only ordinarily hard work to the modern night pilot, and to appreciate the strain involved by each expedition it is necessary to experience one flight in the dark at home, without the additional stimulus provided by the knowledge that beneath your planes hangs suspended enough high explosive to wipe out a battalion.

One of these old night-flying squadrons of the "versatile" type was stationed at no great distance from our aerodrome in France.

When the weather rendered our duties less arduous, we would occasionally visit each other and exchange hospitality and yarns of our day or night experiences with the Boche.

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Many and strange were the tales which would then be circulated—tales against which even Othello's "hairbreadth 'scapes" would have seemed tame had some patient Desdemona heard them out.

Some of them I would like to report in these pages, but for the fact that their interest might be marred by the broad scoring of the censor's pencil; but to give the reader an idea of the wide scope which in certain countries night flying can be made to cover, I will tell of an incident which shows how on one occasion Fritz's unclean linen was washed in public in a very literal sense, and how the washing proved a wash-out in another sense.

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CHAPTER XI

SHIPS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT

ONCE upon a time there was an ancient woman who lived in a small cottage on the outskirts of a village some seven miles behind the English lines in France.

Her hair was silvered by years of honest and unremitting toil, and for a long time she had eked out a scanty livelihood by doing such rough laundry work as the villagers did not trouble to do themselves. She was externally as mild and harmless an old peasant lady as the mind could possibly conceive, and her thrifty living and venerable appearance earned her the respect and confidence of the whole neighbourhood.

Periodically the landlord would collect from her the modest rental of the cottage,

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and the unfailing regularity with which it was produced impressed him so favourably that at last, as token of his goodwill to so honest a tenant, he granted her permission to use the field adjoining her cottage for the purpose of spreading such linen to dry as her small garden would not accommodate.

This field consisted of a broad stretch of level pasture land, and upon it, when the weather was fine, this good old lady would spread the proceeds of her morning's work so that the warm rays of the afternoon sun should reach them most effectively.

Before doing this, however, she would first make sure that the field did not contain any sheep or cattle which might chance to wander over to the corner where her washing was spread out, with the possibility of disastrous results.

Now, humdrum as these homely offices might at first appear, there were several

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points about this old lady's proceedings which might have struck a hyper-suspicious mind as being strangely in accord, had it been possible to suspect so kindly a body of any ulterior motive for her perfectly natural actions.

In the first place, linen, if it be white, when spread out upon the ground is more readily visible from above than almost any other object. The field where the linen was displayed was, as I have said, large and level, and when cattle were pastured there the old woman did not spread her washing; again, it was only on clear and sunny days the linen appeared, just the days when there might be a probability of aircraft being out.

These things, taken together, might have suggested unpleasant possibilities to an observant reasoner, but this simple community of French peasants did not contain that jarring element, the hyper-suspicious

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mind, and so the tiny cottage and its occupant escaped with only ordinary notice from the other villagers.

One evening, Driver Jones of the A.S.C., having burst a tyre and bent an axle, turned his lorry from the main road and drew into the little village for repairs.

The day was far spent and the sun already below the brink of the horizon when, having fixed up a billet near the blacksmith's shop, and done such work upon his car as could be effected without other assistance, the worthy driver, "wearing" a lighted "gasper," strolled out through the straggling houses into the country beyond to enjoy the cool evening air in this peaceful environment.

Seated upon a stile the better to enjoy his cigarette and the after-glow of the waning sunset, he was in the act of lapsing into a reverie, in which possibly the girls of Blighty were most insistent in his

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thoughts, when his ear caught the slow regular beat of a motor engine turning smoothly over. It was unmistakably a motor engine, for did not Jones hear just such a sound hour after hour for a great part of every day of his life and know the throbbing note by instinct? He sat up alert, looking in the direction from which the sound came while his mind rapidly cleared for action.

This engine had a peculiar note which he had not noticed in any car engine before, and the country whence the sound seemed to come showed no signs of a road of any kind, but only fields and grass land spreading away into the distance.

He was about to dismiss the matter from his thoughts with the idea that perhaps a farm tractor was at work, when a sharp report rang out followed by a shout and the sound of splintering wood, and almost immediately the murmur of the engine

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suddenly jerked out into a violent buzzing sound louder than any normal farm tractor could possibly make.

Jones jumped down from the stile and ran forward towards the point from which the sound came. He had only taken a few steps when a dark unwieldy shape, sweeping low over the hedges, passed just above his head, and an aeroplane with engine vibrating and rattling loudly swerved across the field.

One propeller blade had evidently been broken causing the whole fabric to quiver visibly from the uneven rotation, and Jones had just time to notice that it bore no tricolour markings, before the machine lurched away into the gathering dusk to the east, just skimming the tree tops in an unsuccessful attempt to climb.

For a few seconds he stood looking in the direction in which it had vanished, whilst the rattle of the engine grew fainter

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and fainter in the distance, undecided what to do next, his mind full of newly-formed suspicions.

The first instinct of the soldier in an emergency prompted him to rush to the nearest telephone and unburden the doubts of his heart to the local brigade major or his deputy; but Jones was a man of some military experience and remembered that brigade majors are not always friendly and credulous recipients of vague rumours, and so, deciding first to investigate the matter, he crossed several intervening fields and at length reached the point where a broad stretch of pasture land spread away on either hand, having at one corner the tiny cottage near which were spread the evidences of recent laundry activity.

He paused for a moment, glancing up and down the field which the fading light now rendered indistinct, until his eye rested upon two parallel wheel tracks running

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near to the place where he stood having between them a deep furrow from which the earth had evidently been torn by the tail skid of an aeroplane. For some distance he followed these tracks until presently he came upon something which lay heaped up between them, a dark huddled mass.

Closer inspection proved it to be the body of a man, dressed in the typical costume of a French farm labourer.

One side of his head had been smashed in by the stroke of a propeller blade, some fragments of which lay near him, whilst the glancing blow had also broken his shoulder.

* * * * *

From this point Jones ceases to play a leading part in the story, and the brigade major, roused after all by an urgent telephone message, took over the task of clearing up the whole of the shady proceeding.

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To some extent the issue is obscured by the necessary official precautions, but it ultimately transpired that despite his French disguise, the dead man was not of French nationality at all, but a Hun, of an inquisitive variety, who had been carried over the lines in one of the Fatherland's machines and landed at dusk in the broad and level field previously described. It had evidently been intended that, having thus been planted upon French soil, he should proceed to arrange the various means of communication with his own people, which the cunning German mind is continually at pains to devise—passing all the time as a Frenchman with a probably pre-arranged identity and a fluent command of the language. Something had evidently happened to disturb the even tenor of the scheme, and it is possible that in getting out of the machine he may have slipped and fallen into the path of

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the propeller, which would still have been turning over in order to bear the German pilot home again; in any case when the body of this ill-fated apostle of *kultur* was taken to H.Q. for examination, in addition to his other injuries, a bullet, the calibre and rifling of which proved it to be that of a Hun automatic pistol, was extracted from the base of the skull, thus making it difficult to decide to which cause his death was attributable.

It is possible that the pilot, seeing his passenger's fate, had decided to make sure that he was dead before leaving him behind, and may have shot him before starting for home on his damaged machine.

On the other hand, it is equally possible that the *pseudo*-Frenchman may have turned fractious and either refused to carry out his part of the bargain, being afflicted with "cold feet" at the last minute, or he may have shown signs of treachery—

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in which case, with a bullet planted in his head from the pilot's pistol, he may have fallen backwards and been cut down by the guillotine-like stroke of the propeller.

From plans and other documents found in the dead man's possession a large part of the elaborate network of Hun espionage at this point was revealed, and quite a number of elusive persons found a sure resting place in a sphere "from whose bourne no traveller returns," and from which even their cunning and astuteness can find no exit.

A sudden change came over the domestic scene which the designing agents of the "Fatherland" had arranged years before in the idyllic setting of that peaceful little French village.

Never again did the gifted Teuton lady (whose linguistic powers must have been second only to her ability at the wash-tub)

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pursue her apparently humble calling in that simple peasant community. No more did rough cloth or white linen sheet flutter from her clothes line—a signal to some furtive watcher—high up in the evening dusk above, that the field was clear and all ready for a furtive landing.

In their place some broad strips of canvas, firmly pegged and hammered into place, remained spread out to the sunshine for many days after the events recorded, reflecting their unspoken invitation skywards; whilst every evening at dusk there were those who waited around to welcome any other night bird or *pseudo*-Frenchman who happened to come to roost near that little cottage, with the kind of welcome the Allies are always able to give.

Whether any birds responded to this decoy, or whether the Hun airman, returning home with his tragic tale, queered the

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pitch for subsequent adventurers, I know not, but there is little doubt that an unpleasant surprise awaited the next pilot who attempted to dump his load of artfulness in that pleasant field.

From the foregoing true episode I am inclined to arrive at two alternative deductions : either, that there is big money attached to this particular form of Hun secret service work or that there are even more uncertified lunatics amongst the Germans than statistics show at present !

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CHAPTER XII

THE "DUD" ENGINE

Of all the evils to which a pilot is liable when flying beyond the lines I think a "dud" engine is the one most detrimental to his moral.

At home, an engine failure whilst flying usually entails nothing more hazardous than a descent into the most convenient field within gliding distance. Having negotiated his landing successfully, it merely remains for the pilot to fill in the interval before the arrival of the mechanics by seeking for evidences of hospitality in the immediate neighbourhood.

If the inhabitants fail to make any response to his advances he can always sit

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in his machine and wait until something turns up.

On active service a " dud " engine is a much more serious proposition. If his engine happens to fail during the course of a duel in the air, the pilot's chances of figuring in the Roll of Honour are considerable. If an engine happens to become " dud " far over on the German side of the lines, both pilot and observer may as well make up their minds right away to a prolonged course of bread and water in Hunland. That is the rosiest future to which they have to look, for they may, alternatively, be shot down before reaching the ground.

It is on reconnaissance work and long distance bombing that the " dud " engine becomes the greatest menace, and we of the Nth Squadron feared it above every other danger.

I have sat through the long hours of

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a reconnaissance with Hunland passing slowly beneath me, listening to our engine's monotonous drone as if it had been the most glorious music in the world; its harsh, metallic voice, unlovely to an impartial ear, is singing for me the song of freedom.

The slightest break in that song, the smallest hitch in its rhythm, if only for a fraction of a second, is sufficient to jangle the most unresponsive nerves; for although not directly conscious of it at the time, one sits listening intently for little sounds. I have known times, flying thirty miles back over German territory, when the sound of a loose end of cord from the fusilage lacing flapping against the fabric of the machine has caused me a sudden access of fear hardly to be equalled by any other of flying's many chances.

At such times the pilot's hand shoots out instinctively towards his engine con-

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trols whilst before him rises the spectre of that bogey which ever lurks ready to spring from ambush upon the traveller beyond the lines—the "dud" engine.

His mind launches out into the future and pictures the events which may possibly form the sequel of the next few minutes:—The last choking splutter as the engine finally dies away and jars to a standstill—the sudden strange silence, almost uncanny after the accustomed roar of hurtling mechanism—the few seconds of struggle, when the mind, still refusing to accept the situation as irremediable, searches hopelessly in a region of impossibilities for a chance of escape—the last dreary descent through the clear silence, from the free air above towards inevitable captivity below, such is the immediate future and its possibilities as interpreted to the airman beyond the lines through a missing note in his engine's song!

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Thank heaven, such engine failures were very rare in the time of the Nth Squadron, and are even more so to-day—in fact, the ordinary stoppage of an engine owing to mechanical defects is a thing almost unknown, and in the cases where an engine fails overseas it is usually found to have been previously damaged during a fight.

It is the most cold-blooded of all terminations to a flying career—this semi-automatic delivery of an airman into German hands, and I witnessed one such incident when engaged on a long reconnaissance beyond the Somme in the days of the "Great Push."

* * * * *

A trim formation of five machines was following us, and their wings shone white in the sunshine against the green and brown mosaic of the country below.

It was a sight which would have warmed

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the hearts of those early pioneers of flying, could they have seen here the fulfilment of their dreams; those five winged shapes, miraculously poised in the crystal air 10,000 feet above the ground, slipping through space at nearly a hundred miles an hour!

They seemed to be the embodiment of speed and power, these "Cavalry of the Air," as they sped forward to search out the secrets of the land below, and, relinquishing my field glasses for a moment, I allowed my eyes to rest complacently upon our array, feeling that the Hun was indeed justified in treating us, the Nth Squadron and our machines, with particular respect!

It was then that I noticed one of our machines put its nose down suddenly as if intending to dive upon a Hun aeroplane observed below. I glanced down, expecting to see the object of this manœuvre, but

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there were no signs of hostile aircraft visible and for a moment I was completely mystified. Then in an instant I realised what had happened.

Our companion machine had already dropped some distance away to the rear, but not too far for me to be able to notice that its propeller was now stationary, showing up a thick black streak against the engine cowling.

I leaned forward over the gun mounting and touched my pilot's shoulder, pointing downwards to draw his attention to what had happened.

We were now only about fifteen miles from the lines and already well upon our homeward journey, but my pilot immediately shut off his engine, and sweeping round in a wide semicircle, brought our machine back so that we were presently gliding almost alongside our unfortunate companions.

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One glance was sufficient to tell that their case was hopeless.

The wind was unfavourable, being practically due west, and even had it been otherwise the lines would have been almost beyond the range of a glide.

I could see the observer, one "Curly" in name and appearance, standing up in his cockpit, waving his arms wildly about, either as a signal to us, or to give vent to his feelings by some physical demonstrations.

Reluctantly we left our ill-fated friends, unable to help them in any way, and turned back upon our course once more.

I never saw them land, but my eyes followed their machine until it became merely a tiny speck beneath us, moving slowly across the ground.

Poor old "Curly"!

Memory brings back to me the picture of a certain silk slipper which once, when

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attempting to reclaim a pair of borrowed goggles, I found in the pocket of his flying coat . . . .

In a way, that diminutive article of footwear proved an unlucky mascot. And yet—who can tell, for he still, as the old Greeks had it, "sees the sun," even though its rays now reach him through the tainted medium of a German atmosphere?

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CHAPTER XIII

"KNIGHTS OF THE BLACK CROSS"

In no other department of warfare is the German character more strongly revealed than in aerial fighting, and no illustration could show more plainly the workings of the "kultured" mind, than the German method of approaching the problems of war in the air.

Let us trace the evolution of the Hun airman of to-day, from his source of inspiration and training—the German flying organisation.

The Hun flying organisation differs only from other branches of his military control in that it has greater opportunities and a wider scope for advertising its creed.

That creed might be expanded under several headings, and yet could not be

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accurately defined under any one. It shows itself principally in an intense desire for military display—impressiveness—frightfulness, if you will; and it finds vent, as a whole, in a wild waving of the mailed fist in the face of the whole world.

This tendency for insensate parade and show has found in the air an unrivalled means of expression.

From this seed sprang the vast Zeppelin gas bags which were wont to hover about above the metropolis—useless for fighting, useless for work of any kind at the Front, of use only as an advertisement of this organised system of terrorising.

That sort of thing may be impressive in undefended localities, but it does not work in France, where the final tests of efficiency are speed, courage and lead.

Thus the Zeppelins have gradually faded away, to be replaced by further flocks of winged advertisement intended to

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annoy civilians, or, as the German Press would have it, "send them scuttling to their holes like frightened rabbits."

As far as the Hun airman is concerned, he is, apparently, exactly what the training and traditions of his service have made him. Some have said, that of all German soldiers the Hun airman fights most like a gentleman. There are several opinions upon the point, but even if it is true, it is almost impossible to fight in any other way in the air. His most salient characteristic is his lack of individuality. Taken as one of a party of six he is a dangerous, and often a very courageous, antagonist; for the Hun is a gregarious person, and his mind, as a collective thing, is a formidable and crafty proposition to tackle.

But alone in the sky, without a backing of his own countrymen, he is something of a failure. The absence of moral support supplied by the presence of other German

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machines seems to deprive him of most of his initiative.

He evinces a tendency to avoid a definite issue, circles round in an undecided way, and if his opponent shows signs of determined aggression he often takes the earliest opportunity to "beetle off."

This is all the more strange, because in the majority of cases the Hun fights from the start with a strong advantage.

I think I am right in saying that five out of six aerial battles which take place are fought upon the German side of the lines.

This in itself is a circumstance, which, seemingly of no great importance, affects the conduct of a fight to a very great extent and gives the enemy a substantial advantage.

In addition to the fact that fighting over familiar and friendly country is in itself a source of confidence, the Hun pilot knows

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that if he is pursued or overwhelmed by superior numbers he has merely to dive straight down as fast as he can go to find himself in safety inside his own lines.

Again, every manœuvre which the Hun executes whilst in the air is observed and assisted by his own anti-aircraft batteries, whilst he is always fighting in a zone where the arrival of other friendly machines to support him when in difficulties may be confidently expected. Furthermore, he knows that should he chance to bring down a British machine, he will have none of the difficulties in establishing the fact which he might experience in hostile territory.

Just as this knowledge tends to hearten the Hun in his aerial duel, so are there other circumstances which tend to discourage the British pilot in a proportionate degree. He knows that to destroy his Bosche antagonist he must either cripple him, or

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smash his machine completely; whereas the Bosche has only to plant a stray shot in some part of his opponent's engine to ensure, at least, that he will be bagged as a prisoner.

Under these conditions it is surprising that Hun airmen should appear so averse to single combat on the German side of he lines, but there is a circumstance which perhaps accounts for this attitude, and for which the German flying organisation is itself largely responsible.

The enemy, unlike ourselves, regard pilot and observer relatively as master and man.

The German pilot is usually a comparatively uneducated person of the Hun N.C.O. type, and is looked upon merely as the "driver" of the machine.

But the observer is invariably an officer. He is trained scientifically for observation duties, is technically in charge of the

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machine, and is supposed to instruct the driver where to go much in the same way as one might direct a chauffeur.

Theoretically speaking it is a good arrangement, as it is obviously essential that the observer (who has to collect the information which is the whole object of the flight) should be a responsible and highly trained man, whose efficiency and trustworthiness may be relied upon. So much for the theory.

The fallacy of this arrangement in practice is clearly revealed by actual results.

As every one is aware, a fight in the air is a thoroughly personal matter; an individual contest of pilot against pilot; perhaps one of the most clean and decisive methods of fighting the world has ever known.

This is the point at which the German theory breaks down.

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The Hun machine, controlled by the driver and verbally directed by his officer is attacked by a British machine. The driver gets the " wind up." He has no sense of *noblesse oblige* to support him under the strain of physical fear. He is seized with panic and starts to stampede for home.

Of what avail are the protests and maledictions of that highly trained observer under such circumstances ?

The primitive instinct of self-preservation is stronger than the most violent shoutings down a speaking tube, and the driver gains his point and scurries the machine off to safety, officer-observer and all.

Such a phenomenon has been observed by British pilots upon scores of occasions, and machines manned in this way, pursued and brought down inside our lines, have been found to contain pilot and observer in these relative positions.

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The German scout pilot, on the other hand, is an entirely different type of individual to this chauffeur-pilot.

He is thoughtful, exceptionally crafty, and follows the usual Hun tradition, in that he works consistently in unison with other machines.

He is the "chasseur" or fighting man of the German air service, but inbred with his fighting instincts are some of the qualities of the sleuth hound.

He lurks behind the cover of friendly clouds, waiting and watching patiently for an enemy whom he may take at a disadvantage or unawares.

He delights in surprise and sudden concerted action, seldom launching out upon an attack unless he thinks he has the prospect of an almost certain triumph.

At the time when we changed our standard artillery machine for a much

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faster type these gentry had an amusing *contretemps*.

The machine which we had originally been using was a rather slow "tractor," having the top plane considerably longer than the lower. The type by which this machine was replaced resembled its predecessor externally to a remarkable degree, having a similar arrangement of planes, but was possessed of a greater flying speed. In addition to this it was extremely well defended from rear attack, for the observer was placed behind, whereas the previous type had been particularly vulnerable from this position.

One fine morning the wily Hun "chasseurs" noticed a string of British artillery machines, apparently of the usual type, boldly carrying on their work and circling round and round above their targets well over the German side of the lines.

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The Huns rejoiced! Here was a chance to make these unwary English feel the weight of the iron heel!

Cautiously they slipped round so as to obtain the point of vantage from the rear, and dived boldly and hopefully upon what they thought was a certain prey.

Suddenly the machines attacked shot forward at a speed almost equal to that of their pursuers, whilst, horror of horrors! a thick stream of tracer bullets sprayed up from the tail of each, taking deadly toll of the astonished Hun scouts behind.

The British pilots had arranged to "throttle down" and travel at a greatly reduced pace so as to counterfeit the original artillery type and so invite attack by the enemy.

The results of this excellent manœuvre completely upset the Huns' calculations, and since that time they have been very chary of trusting too much to appearances.

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"KNIGHTS OF THE BLACK CROSS"

All fighting pilots who have had any claim to greatness have been individualists. They have studied and perfected certain methods of approaching their object so as to obtain the maximum of concealment, and have also devised and perfected a definite scheme of attack.

There have been two distinct schools of fighting airmen, each of which has its relative advantages.

One type, of which the late Albert Ball was a shining example, pins its faith to the idea of surprising an opponent by drawing to close quarters unobserved. The other school has relied upon effecting surprise, but by another and more simple method; that of approaching an enemy fearlessly and apparently carelessly so as to lead him at first to suppose that he has to deal with an inexperienced airman, and then to suddenly bring into play the most consummate skill in finesse and manœuvre.

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Of German fighting airmen "Baron" Richthoffen presented the most striking personality.

As far as it is possible to develop individuality in a caste-ridden place like Germany, the "Baron" possessed it. But his character was tinged with the strain of bombastic ferocity imparted by the traditions of his service. The "Baron," for instance, delighted to paint his machine a vivid blood-red hue—a childish freak by which he intended to strike terror into the hearts of his opponents after the manner in which a small boy will indulge in the externals of frightfulness by wearing the device of a skull and crossbones.

He seldom set off by himself in search of a fight, but, after the German custom, relied upon his "circus" [1] for a backing.

The enormous number of machines which he is reputed to have destroyed—

[1] Richthoffen's particular following of airmen.

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over eighty—is due principally to the "Baron's" exceptional astuteness and to the Parthian tactics which he employed.

It is a well-known fact that, to the beginner, it is not a particularly easy thing to keep in formation when flying in company with other machines; more especially when the pilot is comparatively new to active service conditions.

For this reason, beginners, partly through ignorance and partly from unwise daring, are apt to straggle away from their formation or lag some distance behind.

Richthoffen knew this peculiarity of the inexperienced flier and it is notorious that a very large percentage of the eighty machines which he is reputed to have brought down would be found to be manned by raw hands and stragglers such as these, whom he observed and specially picked out for destruction.

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PART II

TALES OF TRAINING

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CHAPTER XIV

A PILOT IN THE MAKING

It is the product of a hundred pairs of hands, the result of the minutest scientific calculation, the outcome of most careful experiment, the object for the outlay of several thousands of pounds of public money—and in the end it is handed over to the mercies of a youth, possibly under twenty years of age!

Such is the fate of a modern aeroplane. Its perfect mechanism and wonderful workmanship either survive or are destroyed, according to whether the pilot is skilful or maladroit. Who, then, can wonder that the training of new pilots is an elaborate matter and one of the most important and far-reaching objects with which the air service is concerned?

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Upon the result of that training depend many things.

Economy of factory output, economy of labour and effort, the lives of both pilots and observers, and most important of all —the supremacy of British airmen overseas, both now and in the future.

It was at the end of my period as an observer in France that I became directly concerned with the intricate machinery of the training organisation.

It is the natural fate of all observers—at least, of all those who survive their term of "shock-absorbing" overseas, and it forms a grateful interval of comparative repose between the first and second acts of the aeronautical career—service overseas as observer and service overseas as pilot.

To this mechanism, therefore, I was automatically handed over, more or less in the condition of raw material, and after an interval of some months, I was produced

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at the other end a finished pilot, complete with "wings."

It is of this process of manufacture and of the machine itself, which I propose to write.

To many people in England, the training of the air service is either a daily source of interest or a daily nuisance, according to their distance from, or proximity to, a training aerodrome.

Almost continuously and in all weathers they hear the persistent drone of machines in the sky overhead as they circle about gracefully and as it appears aimlessly.

The noise starts at dawn and continues fitfully until dusk, occasionally punctuated by the rattle of a machine gun, or the distant thud of a live bomb.

Sometimes there is a "crash," and a dark column of smoke is observable in the environs of the aerodrome, followed shortly perhaps by the whirl of a red

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cross ambulance hastening in the direction of the fall.

These things are some of the visible features of a training centre, but the inner working of the organisation itself is generally unknown and often unappreciated.

Before the War the word "training" was associated in the minds of English-speaking peoples, principally with two things—the exercise of racehorses, and the process of travel by railway. In the sense in which it is known to millions of men and women to-day the word was then scarcely ever used.

In the general way, a man much over twenty rather resented the idea that he *could* be trained in anything. Whatever of training had occurred in his life had been left behind with school books, impositions and other dreary and childish things. Training—in its true sense—first began to be generally recognised in this

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country towards the latter end of 1914: it was then associated with the gentle art of "forming fours."

It was revealed to the newly made subaltern when he discovered that—in the military sense—even the possession of a brand new "Sam-Browne" belt is not the only qualification required of an infantry officer. I remember certain "old Army" sergeants who were wont to point this fact out in a respectfully abusive way to their "squads" of officers.

To-day, however, training has become a sort of national watchword, a necessary evil which has invaded almost every department of life. Training may be taken variously. As a bore, a joke, or a serious duty.

Personally I am inclined to think that a judicious combination of the last two methods is the most pleasant and rational way, for even if one incline to be serious

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over one's training, it is often difficult not to see its humorous side at times.

Indeed I think one of the most charming sights I ever witnessed was that of a newly promoted and somewhat elderly infantry captain, with spurs on upside down, lecturing a party of attentive and deadly serious subalterns on the subject of "military deportment"!

The training of an airman, however, has many different and special aspects.

It contains both comedy and tragedy; it may appear, within the space of a single minute, the most exhilarating sport in the world or one of the most terrifying experiences imaginable. It entails both mental and physical study and strain; for the instruction a pupil receives upon the ground he is afterwards called upon to put into practical effect in the air.

It is at once the most exacting of trainings and the most enjoyable of experiences

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that a man can undergo, and in order to provide the reader with some idea of what this training actually consists, I purpose to give a brief sketch of my experiences when, having returned from France, I was privileged to take the air alone for the first time.

To flying men and those to whom such matters are an every-day concern I must offer an apology, both for this homely description and for the gratuitous advice I have endeavoured to give.

* * * * *

The first step which I had to take at the commencement of my training was to "report." Almost every move of a military nature involves this important ceremony, and it is a process which, needless to say, is in no way connected with journalism, although it sounds like it!

The person to whom I "reported" was the adjutant of my future training

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squadron. He regarded me wearily over a pile of papers (I learnt afterwards that I was the twelfth pupil who had arrived that morning) and proceeded to enter down particulars about me in a species of "black book."

I remember that various personal matters were revealed in this examination of my past, and among other things certain gloomy information as to the name and address of the next-of-kin whom I should desire to be notified in case of a fatal accident!

I felt almost depressed at this unseemly discussion of what I had hoped to be a very remote contingency, and having unloaded a further series of particulars in regard to the dates of my last "inoculation," "vaccination," etc., I gladly withdrew from the presence to "report" to my flight commander.

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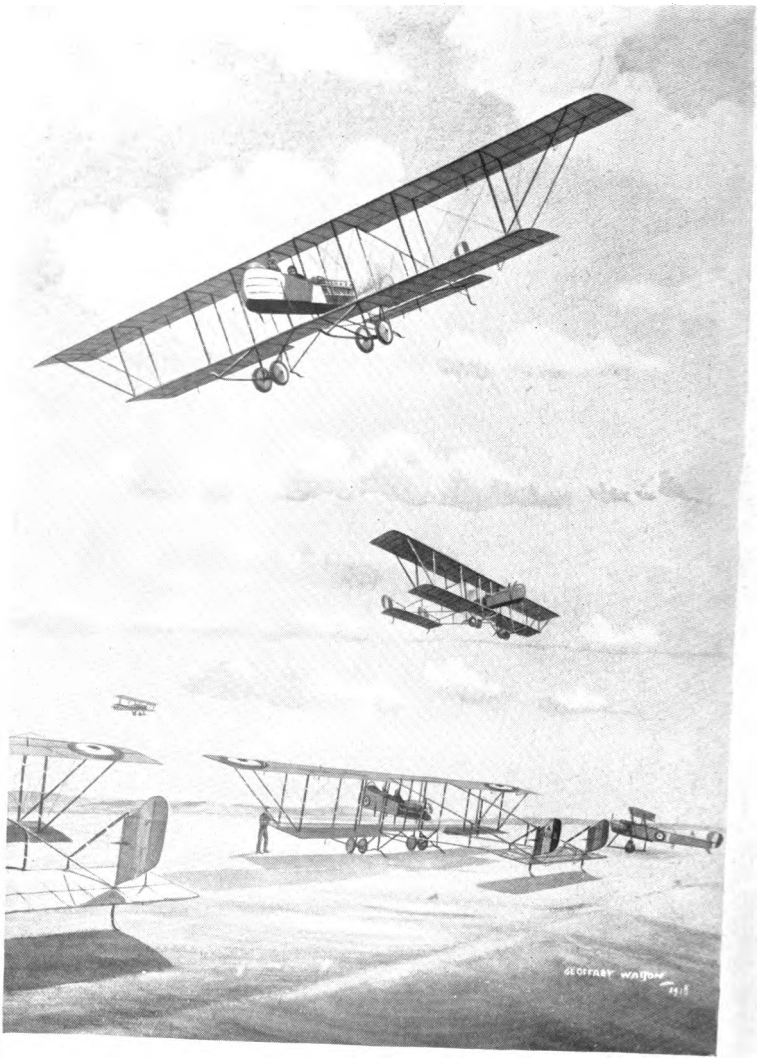

"SHORT-HORNS" AT A FLYING SCHOOL.

[*Facing page* 227.

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Of the machines on which I subsequently received instruction, the first was a venerable monstrosity familiarly known as "the Short-Horn." It was one of the first types of "pusher" aeroplanes invented, and—superseded long ago by superior types overseas—has survived to drag out an ignominious old age at the hands of pupils at home.

To those who have not seen this archaic but extremely comfortable machine, this illustration will probably give some idea as to the relative positions of pilot and pupil when flying.

The pupil sits right in the fore part of the boat-shaped nacelle and the instructor just behind him, within easy speaking distance when the engine is shut off, and with peculiar facilities for jerking the pupil in the ribs should he prove abnormally violent in his handling of the controls.

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My particular instructor, who happened to be the flight commander, believed in verbal exhortation as the best method of instruction.

He possessed an unrivalled vocabulary, and at times, sitting as it were on a species of peninsula with the machine and planes behind me, and only a wind screen and unlimited space in front, I could hear, above the roar of the engine, a voice shouting a medley of strange oaths, advice, and imprecations, whilst I clutched tightly on to the controls as the only tangible objects available.

At such times I longed to be alone on my peninsula, and being unable to talk out of the back of my head (at least, literally), I was powerless to give my version of the affair in suitable language to the aggressor behind me. *Br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r*, sings our engine, *br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r . . . r-r.* (A taint, but evidently

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shouting, voice : " Keep her nose UP, you ——! Can't you see the speed indicator ? ! ") *Br-r . . . br-r-r-r-r-r* (Voice : " No ! I didn't say *loop* the —— thing ! "), *br-r-r-r* (Voice ceases and I raise my hands above my head in resignation whilst the instructor takes control and rights the bus), *br-r . . . Br-r-r-r-r-r-r* (Voice : " Now then, take her again ! "), *br-r-r-r-r . . .*

We proceed on our way and I make up my mind to be very skilful !

Br-r-r-r-r . . .—! Suddenly the engine is shut off, and the machine's nose (including ourselves) goes down violently.

" Bring her down and land her ! " shouts the voice accompanied by the gentle clicking of tappets behind us.

I set my nerves, push my head sideways round the wind screen, and eye the rapidly approaching ground intently.

Confound that machine on the aerodrome, will it taxi across our path or shall

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I turn slightly? Yes—just a little rudder —that's right!

How long this glide seems—ah! here comes the ground. . . . Now!

I pull the controls gently backwards, hoping that we shall just glide along above the surface of the ground.

I am too late!

There is a jolt—the machine bounces like an india-rubber ball, and losing speed seems to hang for a breathless second about twenty feet above the ground. I become thoroughly nervy and try to pull the controlls further back against a determined pressure from the instructor's controls behind me. All is well, however, for our engine starts going happily once more and we gather flying speed.

Br-r-r-r-r-r-r (Voice: "—— —— —— ——!") *br-r-r*. . . .

* * * * *

At last we are stationary on the

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aerodrome, our engine still "ticking" over.

I have done several good landings!

My instructor is standing up, unstrapped preparatory to getting out of the machine.

"Now then!" he says, leaning over me, as I sit in my place, "Carry on just as you have done these last five circuits and you'll be all right! *Au revoir!*"

For a few seconds I sit with my hand on the throttle lever, gazing along the line in which I shall have to "take off" to fly into the wind. My instructor stands expectantly by the machine, watching me.

Here goes!

I jamb the throttle fully forward, grip the controls, and place my faith in Providence.

Heavens! how the tail swings!

Now then—some rudder! Ah!

I am off the ground at last—and alone! Strangely enough I feel particularly confi-

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dent—more so than I did under the critical supervision of the instructor.

I know what to do, and have now only to do it. I think of the strange people I have seen at times walking about adorned with "wings"—surely if such as these can fly . . . ? I hearten myself by this mental comparison.

The row of trees at the end of the aerodrome passes beneath me. The engine is pulling well and running perfectly smoothly.

I keep straight on, climbing steadily at fifty miles an hour and gradually gaining height. Then I turn very slowly to the right so that the aerodrome comes once more into view.

It is possibly one of the most delicious moments of my life, this sensation of control, speed and flight. I can plainly see the flight sheds and the machines upon the aerodrome and make a rapid note as to the

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positions of these with a view to the landing which is to crown my first effort with success.

My head is frequently in the "office."

I find it difficult in a pusher machine to tell at what angle I am flying, as no part of the machine is visible to me unless I turn my head, and I am not sufficiently experienced to fly by instinct or the feel of the controls.

My eye searched the instrument board for that best of all guides—the air speed indicator.

I know that by keeping my speed at about fifty miles an hour, I am safe from the danger of stalling and losing control of the machine owing to lack of speed.

At length I find myself well away from the aerodrome and facing directly into the wind once more.

It only remains for me to judge the right moment to shut off my engine and a straight

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glide will take me to earth somewhere within the landing area.

I make my decision, shut off my engine, and put the machine's nose down with a determined jerk.

In a few minutes' time my troubles are over—in the more pleasant sense!

Rather flat turns, rather a fast glide, a somewhat poor landing, but I have done it, I have acquired a peculiar dignity—in short—I am a "soloist."

I taxi up to the flight sheds, assisted by two mechanics, one at each wing tip, whom in my excitement I keep running all the way across the aerodrome at the rate of about twelve miles an hour.

"That's all right!" says the flight commander encouragingly.

"Be down for early flying at 6 a.m. to-morrow—you can have "2002," he adds.

I am elated.

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I go to the mess and search for people to discuss the great event with.

This has been a red letter day—one of the most important of my career, as it seems to me.

* * * * *

But next morning, at 6 a.m., with the chill wisdom of dawn, I begin to realise how much I have still to learn!

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CHAPTER XV

"THE UNOFFICIAL 'HUN'"

IT will surprise quite a number of people to learn that every training aerodrome in England possesses scores of fit young men answering to the designation of "Huns," and still enjoying complete immunity from all restraint, despite the excellent accommodation provided in internment camps!

Such, however, is the case.

I myself have been a "Hun," have been openly referred to as such, and have borne the unpleasant title with good humour.

But the word "Hun," as used in connection with pupils under instruction in aviation, is a term entirely devoid of any association with those other airmen who are known to the daily Press as "Baby-killers."

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No, the offensive designation merely implies that the bearer has not yet become a finished "pilot," and conveys nothing sinister beyond this single fact.

How the name first originated I am unable to say. It may be the wholesale demolition of under-carriages, associated with those engaged in learning to fly, was typical of the wanton destruction characteristic of the Hun proper.

In any case the name remains, and will probably continue to be applied to embryo pilots long after the present bearers of the title have passed into oblivion.

On a particular morning of which I shall write I was a "Hun" myself, and I cannot remember an occasion upon which I have felt more thoroughly Hunnish.

The excitement of my "first solo" flight of the previous evening had passed away and left me once more conscious of my inexperience.

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Day had scarcely broken, and I watched the mechanics on early flying duty, dragging the cumbersome "2002" from its shed, out on to the aerodrome.

Already the air was filled with the intermittent crackling of engines being "run up" in the other flights, and a stiff breeze causing the wind indicator to stand out almost horizontally.

Even in the half light "2002" did not look exactly prepossessing.

It had a weather-beaten and time-worn exterior that seemed to speak of a chequered and crash-strewn past.

Many "prentice" hands had evidently worked their will upon it. Its planes were patched in as many places as a comedian's trousers, and no particular part of it could be definitely ascribed to any separate period of time. The wings were elderly; their patches were obviously of various shades and dates; the under-carriage is

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new; one wheel was new; the rudder bore an extraordinarily crude delineation of the figures "2002," obviously the handiwork of some local artist.

Everything upon it pointed to the same obvious deduction.

It was the pupil's "bus"—the long-suffering, long-lived, oldest-inhabitant of the flight sheds!

I regard this externally decrepit vehicle somewhat askance, for the glamour of the previous evening's exploit has begun to wane.

It is one thing to fly a machine for a single circuit round an aerodrome, having a few minutes previously done exactly the same thing with an instructor behind you, but it is quite another proposition to rise straight from bed and proceed to aviate in a different machine and with a stiff breeze blowing from an unfamiliar direction.

I harden my heart, however, climb into

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the nacelle, "run up" the engine, and in a few minutes we are racing across the aerodrome into the teeth of the wind.

I have seldom spent a more enjoyable half-hour in the air.

"2002" behaves in an exemplary manner. It is almost as if, in consequence of continual dealings with pupils, she has developed a sort of "nursing instinct."

She rights herself in bumps in an almost protective way, and the engine runs smoothly without the slightest sign of a break. The wind is just strong enough to demand sufficient attention to keep me awake, and I circle about round the aerodrome, gradually enlarging my sphere of operations, and even making voyages of discovery in the direction of neighbouring farms and villages.

It should be said here that the "pusher" type of machine and the "short-horn" particularly has many advantages often

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unappreciated by more progressive flying men. In the first place one has an unequalled view, and a sense of detachment from all things material—indeed, unless one looks behind it is almost like being projected into space in a species of aerial canoe. In the front seat there is practically no wind or draught, and goggles are quite unnecessary. The engine being behind, its noise and vibration lose a very great part of their effect, whilst, incidentally, the pilot is exempt from spraying oil and fumes from the exhaust.

It is, in fact, the sort of machine which one can imagine will be popular among the octogenarians of some future age and persons requiring a staid and sedate means of transit.

But, from a military point of view and to persons who wish to fly in the true sense of the word, the "short-horn" is entirely without attraction. As a medium for

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acrobatics it is practically useless, whilst in the event of a crash it is something of a death trap as compared to a "tractor" machine for the evident reason that it is better to fall upon the engine than for the engine to fall upon you.

However, whatever the merits or demerits of my machine, this second experience of flying is far more pleasant than I could have anticipated.

For the first time I feel the unequalled sense of freedom which passage through the air engenders and which as a "shock-absorber" I have never properly enjoyed —the feeling of effortless control; the knowledge that by exerting the pressure of a few pounds with my hand, I can cause my machine to travel in any direction I choose, untrammelled by restrictions, unconfined by highway of road. The whole sky lies before me, a broad expanse which I am free to traverse at will.

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It is perhaps the greatest charm of flying—this release from the material restraints which hem one in on every side on the ground, and I feel it especially on this particular morning.

The fresh south wind, which the warmth of the early sun has not yet turned into a sea of "bumps" strengthens this impression of detachment. It flows across the country below like a deep, smooth, stream in which I am floating.

If I happen to turn across the current, it drifts me over the ground so that I seem to travel sideways like a crab. If I steer the machine straight into it, our speed in relation to the earth drops considerably, whilst a sharp turn down wind causes us to travel at a vastly increased pace.

The "short-horn" is not a brilliant climber and my height above the ground may only be reckoned in hundreds of feet.

I can see the branches of the trees wav-

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ing beneath me, the ripple of the wind over the grass, every detail of the country below. It is a new aspect of flying to me and one which adds greatly to its reality; for flying in France at an average height of 10,000 feet above the ground, the observer loses his sense of the relative importance of earth and sky.

The ground seems then so immeasurably far away that it retires from all significance and ceases to take the character of a hard relentless enemy, whose touch may mean destruction. It is seen only as a vaguely distant blur forming the circular base of a vast inverted bowl of sky above.

Even speed is no longer calculable in relation to the ground, but becomes a thing which one can only gauge by the reading of instruments, the sound of singing wires, and the relative progress of other craft in the air.

At a few hundred feet above the ground

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flying ceases to be a sensation and becomes a grim and dangerous reality.

There is the earth below, bristling with obstructions, dangers, possibilities. You become conscious of your speed in relation to numerous clearly defined and unpleasantly concrete objects upon it. No longer is there the delightful feeling of support and movement in a tranquil element.

There is a wind blowing—you are "bumped" sharply and have to struggle with your controls against a malignant pressure which seems trying deliberately to overturn the machine.

The cross drift of the wind upsets all ideas of direction; you become alert, worried, keenly observant of every detail.

And now for the landing!

You shut off your engine, but a sudden bump throws the machine sideways just as you have composed yourself to land.

The machine seems to rise and fall

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erratically on its passage towards the ground. You land—bounce! Land—bounce again! hang in the air for a few seconds, and finally settle down with a jerk and an expression of thanksgiving!

* * * * *

I started to taxi in after my second solo with a conviction that I had hopelessly strained my under carriage, and that it would certainly collapse before I could reach the sheds.

But I had underrated 2002's hardy constitution, however, for she had scarcely turned a hair—or to be more accurate a wire. Only one strand of bracing cable had snapped, but otherwise her landing gear was absolutely intact. I informed the "rigger" concerned as to the damage and hastened to enter particulars of my doings in the "Flight Book" and also in my own private log book.

This done, as there still remained nearly

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an hour before breakfast could be obtained at the mess, I strolled out on to the aerodrome to enjoy a cigarette and the spectacle of any other "Hun" who might be making his aeronautical *début*.

* * * * *

It was one of our recognised diversions to witness a brother pupil's performance at this critical point of his training. At such times we would gather together outside the flight sheds, watching the "first soloist's" preparations and speculating as to the probable survival of his undercarriage.

I could naturally enter into the feelings of these "first soloists" as they taxied out to get into a favourable position for their first take-off, and there must be few occasions which reveal difference of temperament to the same extent as the study of various personalities at this particular moment.

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Some pupils taxied out and "took off" in a matter-of-fact manner which might lead one to believe the performance was one of the most commonplace experiences imaginable.

These were of the stuff from which good flying men are made.

There was another type of pupil who, under a tense and determined expression, did his best to conceal an evident hope that his engine would burst before he got off the ground. He was usually disappointed over this, however, and the machine having persisted in taking him into the air, he would resign himself to fate and decide to make the best of the situation.

One type of man was particularly irritating. He would fidget with his goggles, ask the same question about the engine "revs" at least five times, try to taxi off before the "chocks" had been removed, and generally worry the mechanics to the verge of insubordination

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On these occasions the betting in favour of the survival of the under-carriage would run very low, and in the end there was usually a crash to collect before sundown.

Again, there was the "absent-minded beggar"—the man who never bethought himself until the last moment to find out the direction of the wind; who forgot to turn his petrol on until ten minutes abortive "prop swinging" suggested that something was amiss; and who inevitably went up without strapping himself into the machine.

This sort of man usually left the aerodrome, lost his way, and having flown in some direction unknown for about two hours, landed in a ploughed field some eighty miles away.

Having achieved this result he would apparently be overcome by inertia for a considerable period, until, at about midnight, it would suddenly occur to him that

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he ought to wire information to his squadron that he had landed safely. This he would proceed to do, carefully omitting, however, to state *where*, and apparently oblivious of the fact that it is an important point for consideration as to whether, having landed in the field, the machine can be safely flown out of it again.

After a careful investigation of the telegraphic "office of origin," inquiry of the local police, and sundry proceedings entailing much mental exercise for the adjutant, the machine would be located, the pupil "strafed," and some instructor would get a joy-ride, and a day off, collecting it again.

When a "Hun" was sent off upon his "first solo" the time, manner and place of his first landing was usually a matter of considerable uncertainty.

The time might be anything from two minutes to two hours from the moment of

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"taking-off," and the manner and place of his descent was a subject of even wider possibilities. He might finally reach the ground by shinning down the trunk of some friendly tree, leaving his machine hanging above in the branches like a species of damaged fruit, or perhaps, as was fortunately more often the case, he might be inspired to land respectably upon the aerodrome within the normal time of about ten minutes.

These vagaries of the "first soloist" added a sporting flavour to our process of instruction and provided a continual source of amusement to all.

Where is the justification of that Frenchman, who is once reputed to have said, "You English take your pleasures sadly"?

Surely he had never visited a Training Aerodrome!

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CHAPTER XVI

A "WRITE-OFF"

THERE is a thud, a cloud of dust, the sound of grinding mechanism—followed by a tense and expressive silence.

"He's 'dumped his goods' *this* time anyhow!" remarks a fellow onlooker with an air of finality.

The statement is so obvious that I feel further comment unnecessary. There in the centre of the aerodrome lie the "goods"—a tangled mass of wires, spars, and other *débris* piled up upon a foundation of scrap-iron that once was an engine.

Standing beside the said "goods" is the man who has "dumped" them, rubbing his head in a dazed manner, and doubtless wondering how it has all happened.

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He glances from earth to sky, and sky to earth again as if expecting to find the solution of this mystery suspended above in the form of some cunning aerial trap or trip-wire which has thus brought about his downfall!

At this point the ambulance dashes out and races towards the " crash " at a thrilling pace.

The driver can see nobody has been hurt, but he likes to show to all whom it may concern that he is alert and ready for an emergency at a moment's notice. He draws up near the crash in a cloud of dust, jumps out with a dexterity suggestive of cinema experience, and approaches the unhappy pilot and his " goods."

Strangely enough the pilot refuses a pressing invitation to come to the hospital, so the ambulance driver, baulked of his prey, meanders slowly back again to his lair with a discontented air.

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He is an ill-omened fellow, that ambulance man, ever watching the aerodrome in search of trouble.

Upon ordinary occasions he is never seen, for he leads an obscure and malignant existence in the neighbourhood of the M.O.'s hut, and it is only when some one "piles up" a machine by spinning into the ground or some such effort of frightfulness, that he is suddenly brought into sinister prominence, and darts out like a spider from his web at an unwilling fly.

This time, however, he is sent empty away, and the pupil resumes his head-rubbing and meditation.

This is only the initial stage of the comedy—the work of little over a minute.

A miscellaneous crowd of people suddenly springs from nowhere and converges upon the wreck. The mechanics from the flight to which the machine belongs come running towards the scene, followed by the

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flight sergeant at a more leisurely pace, muttering curses. "More —— work! . . . This spell of fine weather 'll be the death of me!" etc., etc.

Air mechanic X., deputed for duty with the "late flying party," mentally cancels an engagement to "walk out" that evening.

"Just my luck!" he mutters, hurrying forward, "I knew he'd do it from the start."

Everybody, in fact, who has chanced to witness the unfortunate's first attempt to land has also "known it from the start," whilst the five abortive attempts which followed the first in rapid succession strengthened the belief to a conviction.

"I suppose we'd better go out and lend a hand," suggests my neighbour, and we forthwith drop our detached attitude as spectators and become interested participants.

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In the neighbourhood of the crash there is evidence of a widespread attempt to set at nought certain Army Council instructions. Cameras are furtively produced, and the scrap heap subsequently attains immortality in the albums of several collectors of "crash" photographs.

Then the flight commander arrives upon the scene and searches out the author of the whole business, who has "faded away" to the rear of the crowd and is trying to convince his critics that a gust of wind was responsible for the *débâcle*.

Some facetious person at length agrees with him, adding that "wind up" must be a trying complaint—especially when it comes in gusts!

As the flight commander draws near the wreck we hover round expectantly, hoping to gleam some of the pearls of rhetoric for which he is justly noted; I know what to expect, for he was once my instructor.

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I recognise several of the expressions of old, but now, directed at some one else, they strike me as being less pointed than of yore.

The pupil bends to the storm, is told to stand by until the *débris* has been collected, and replies meekly in the time-worn military formula, "Very good, sir!"

As there are no "classes" for the moment, and all our machines are in use, we assist the mechanics in loading the fragments of the machine upon a trolley.

This done, the "write off" is slowly towed towards the flight sheds to be broken up, and we follow it to its last resting place almost in the manner of a funeral procession and greatly to the annoyance of other people who are anxious to land.

The squadron equipment officer is summoned and eyes the wreckage pessimistically; the flight commander goes over

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to the C.O.'s office to ask about another machine; the unfortunate individual responsible for all the trouble, wonders again for the umptieth time how on earth it all happened and tries to reconcile our candid criticisms of the affair with his own vague memories.

These are the normal events which accompany a "crash" on a training aerodrome.

It is a difficult situation from the pilot's point of view, but in order to emerge from the ordeal with a certain amount of dignity there are several points about "crashing" which should always be borne in mind by the embryo "crasher."

In the first place, do not, having pancaked your machine from a height of about 20 feet, attempt to explain the subsequent unpleasantness by remarking, "I *thought* I was on the ground."

It is clearly laid down by Biblical

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authority that by " taking thought a man cannot even add one cubit to his stature "— it is therefore obviously futile to hope to raise the surface of the ground some 20 feet by merely *thinking* you are on it !

Again, the exercise of a little tact often relieves the situation considerably.

Do not, having prodded the ground with two thousand pounds-worth of machinery emerge smiling from the wreckage and inform an apoplectic C.O. that *you* are quite unhurt !

The good man may burst a blood vessel and furthermore he may say things injurious to your feelings.

Rather, having led him privily to the spot, point out some portion of the machine (if any) which may chance to have survived undamaged.

In this way his wrath will be assuaged, for there is much philosophic consolation to be derived from the argument that

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"half an undercarriage is better than no machine" at all.

By such means a man may go far in spite of his indifferent qualities as a pilot.

But the most important maxim to be observed by amateur "crashers" is:—Don't do it too frequently—lest it be written of you in "Orders," that "having been killed as the result of an aeroplane accident" you have been "struck off the strength of the Training Division with effect from that date."

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CHAPTER XVII

"The Cavalry of the Air"

Perhaps the strangest phenomenon of the War has been the enormous and unexpected development of flying—the rapid process which has advanced the history of aviation by more than fifty years at a bound. But I think I am right in saying that nine out of ten people are under a wrong impression as to the true direction in which progress has chiefly been made.

The average person, with just a normal interest in flying matters, if asked to what source we were principally indebted for this aerial development, would almost certainly reply by a eulogy of the ingenuity of modern inventors or a similar platitude about the miracles of modern science.

This is quite an erroneous impression.

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The part played by invention in the progress of modern flying since war broke out has been small in comparison to the strides which have been made in the development of flying itself as an art. The machines which we use to-day are, on the whole, far more difficult to control and dangerous to fly than those employed in 1914, and it is only the increased skill and knowledge of flying instilled into modern pilots which has made the use of these machines possible.

Only the other day a civilian with whom I was discussing flying remarked, "Anyhow, there's nothing much in the actual flying of a machine nowadays; I understand a machine has been invented which practically flies itself!"

This idea, that modern machines are "automatically stable" and "practically fly themselves," is held by a very large number of people. It first arose from the

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fact that many types of machines have their planes set at a "dihedral angle" (viz., sloping upwards in a flattened V shape), which gives the aeroplane a tendency to settle laterally upon a level keel. This so-called "stability" was discussed at one time in the press, and has given birth to the belief that machines are semi-automatically controlled.

As a matter of fact, the idea of automatic control for an aeroplane, especially a fighting machine, is ludicrous in the extreme, for it means that a portion of the control is taken from the pilot and given to the aeroplane. One is left to imagine the pilot's position during a fight, when his machine tends to go one way and he another.

To give the lay reader an accurate idea of the advance which has been made in the science of flying is a difficult matter, and one which is likely to involve techni-

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cality. Perhaps it is best revealed in the fact that at the beginning of the War a pilot who looped, spun or rolled his machine was looked upon as a person of remarkable daring—in fact, I myself was wont to regard such men with envy and admiration. To-day, I have had pupils with only twenty hours' air experience who have been able to perform these feats with the utmost *sang-froid.* It is not that modern pilots differ temperamentally from those early airmen of 1914, but, since then, the methods of training have improved to such an extent that flying has been transformed from a difficult problem into an exact science.

In the old days a man who went up in control of an aeroplane felt himself to be a pioneer—a person vested with a unique responsibility and placed at the mercy of a strange element. Everything which he did whilst in the air was of the nature of

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an experiment, and although the machine he flew would have presented few difficulties to an up-to-date pilot, to him it was a thing of fearful and wonderful possibilities.

All honour to those early pioneers who have paved the way for those that follow after them!

Turning from the question of the development of pilots to that of the machines they fly, one is confronted with a somewhat different proposition.

The modern aeroplane is a war machine—an engine of speed and destruction. Everything in its design and build aims at three things—speed, climbing power, and agility in manœuvre. Almost every other consideration has been sacrificed in order to obtain these three objects.

Regard this efficient and deadly engine of war, and then consider the dream of the post-war commercial aeroplane—the

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machine which will take cabbages from your back garden to the local market for sale; which will convey the portly stockbroker and his family to Trouville for their summer orgy on the Continent; which will carry important mails from London to Rome. Think of these homely possibilities of flying, and then consider the fearsome responsibility of having in your charge those cabbages, that stockbroker, or those mails, and attempting to negotiate a forced landing in a small field on a modern type of machine which has a gliding angle of seventy miles an hour! One can see that the development of flying —as war-flying—has been great indeed, but for the palmy days of peace and the joys thereof, the modern fighting aeroplane in its present state will hardly be a convenient vehicle.

Of course, the experience which designers have gained in their search for

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machines of speed and climbing will stand them in good stead when they are required after the War to build something of a steadier type which can be landed at a reasonably low speed; but at the present time the whole tendency of modern aeroplanes is in the direction of efficiency in the air at the expense of those qualities of safety and reliability which will be required of aeroplanes in peace time.

* * * * *

As the Air Service in France has gradually increased in dimensions and efficiency, so have its duties multiplied in proportion.

In the early days of the War, when the Royal Flying Corps possessed only some ninety machines (of which about fifty were fit for active service), the work of aeroplanes in war was limited practically to a single duty—that of performing such reconnaissance work over enemy country as our cavalry were prevented from carry-

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ing out owing to the enclosed nature of the ground.

The possibility of aerial fighting scarcely entered into the programme at all, and when the necessity for aggression arose pilots and observers were compelled to resort to such weapons as revolvers and Winchester rifles to strafe their opponents. Since then the aeroplane has become a vital and integral factor in almost every phase of war.

The artillery rely upon the assistance of the machines above them to direct their fire. It is the presence of scouts on "contact patrol" which keeps the advancing infantry in touch with their own Headquarters, whilst low bombing aeroplanes and trench-strafers co-operate with them continuously. The work of the staff is simplified by the activities of the photography machines, which render the duties of even the expert Hun camouflagist a matter of extreme

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difficulty. Almost daily every sector and sub-sector of the line is photographed, and the results, pieced together, present a complete and up-to-date picture of the enemy's position upon the ground below. These results are closely scrutinised. Perhaps one day a tiny clump of trees makes its appearance upon the photograph at a point behind the lines where the evidence of preceding photographs proves that nothing previously existed.

In a short space an artillery machine takes the air, our guns get to work, and on the next day's photo of the lines a group of shell craters marks the spot which once sheltered an enemy gun emplacement.

These are a few of the duties which are performed by the Air Force in France.

To foretell in what strange capacities yet another year of war will find aircraft employed is beyond the power of the hardiest imagination.

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Every day adds something new to the record of flying achievement; every month marks some fresh stage in the development of a service whose future seems almost as wide and unbounded as the element which it has done so much to conquer.

With a history scarcely ten years old, and from beginnings ludicrously small and insignificant, the Air Force has developed into an immense organisation whose activities influence every department of warfare, and whose operations have transformed what was formerly merely a battle front into a battle area.

With a past so full of glorious achievement, a present so abundant in possibilities, who then could hope to foretell the future of "the Cavalry of the Air"?

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